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Jing Cao  
*Cornell University*

Desiree Thomas  
*Cornell University*

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## When Developing a Career Path, What are the Key Elements to Include?

### Abstract

**Question:** When developing a career path from scratch, what are the key elements to include in the design process and what factors lead to a successful implementation?

### Keywords

human resources, career path, plan, performance management

### Comments

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### FINAL QUESTION

*When developing a career path from scratch, what are the key elements to include in the design process and what factors lead to a successful implementation?*

### INTRODUCTION

Although often touted as a standalone process, employee career pathing will be most effective if it is integrated into a company's overall talent management strategy (see Appendix A). By aligning talent management processes and providing linkage between job roles, desired competencies, and key experiences, career paths direct employees towards the company's future competitiveness.<sup>1,2</sup>

### DESIGNING A CAREER PATH FROM SCRATCH

**Step 1: Create a Career Roadmap:** Career maps are used to show what a prototypical career looks like in terms of sequential positions, roles, and stages. They outline common avenues for moving within and across jobs in ways that facilitate growth and career advancement. Career maps are typically displayed in a diagram, making it easy to visualize each position or role as a stage in a path. Organizations may use existing competency grades or job bands to define vertical and horizontal hierarchies, and they can also do so by compiling organizational knowledge to create a general framework. Some companies choose to provide additional information such as common moves when changing careers, number of employees in a particular job role and the growth across those populations, and different job categories in particular business units. This information is particularly useful as employees become more versatile and move across job roles in different parts of the business to increase their expertise.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

**Step 2: Build Position Profiles:** Position profiles create distinctions among job roles in career paths by outlining their core responsibilities, skills, and requirements. To do this, organizations consult subject-matter experts, interview functional leaders, and conduct external industry benchmarking. It is also important to determine the qualifications and expertise associated with different career positions, roles, and stages. This might include the recommended or required education, skills, technical training, licenses, and certifications for successful performance at each stage.<sup>3,5</sup>

**Step 3: Identify Core Competencies and Expected Behaviors:** Competencies should specify differentiating behavior that is exhibited by outstanding performers, and also serve as performance standards that define expected results in different functions. In this way, competencies will drive on-the-job performance and connect business strategy and change initiatives to the workforce through behavioral standards. Additionally, in an effort to vertically align career path design with the strategic talent management process, companies have introduced the concept of "vertically integrated" competencies (see Appendix B). These competencies tend to be the same from one career stage to the next, but what differs between stages is the expected scope and impact at which the competencies are expressed.<sup>1,4</sup>

**Step 4: Incorporate Training and Development:** Organizations can link career paths to employee development by prioritizing position profile characteristics and identifying key experiences that employees should acquire as they move along the career path. Developmental opportunities may include, for example, leadership training courses, stretch assignments, cross-functional teams, profit and loss responsibility, or international exposure. These experiences provide the opportunity to develop competencies that are important for the next career stage.

Outlining critical development experiences allows managers and employees to have more meaningful career discussions and helps determine realistic career moves.<sup>1, 3, 4, 5</sup>

**Step 5: Establish Accountability:** With the large amount of resources invested in the career pathing process, organizations should create mechanisms to ensure its effectiveness. These mechanisms should build accountability for the process by defining the roles and responsibilities of individuals who support it, ensuring it can adapt to changing business conditions.<sup>5</sup>

## KEY FACTORS FOR A SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

### **Communication:**

Companies should communicate to their employees about the organization's career development philosophy. Important questions may include: What is the role of the employee versus the role of the manager? Are employees empowered to drive their own career movement, or are managers responsible for orchestrating career moves? Furthermore, what is the company's perspective on, and management of, critical career success factors such as depth versus breadth of expertise, international assignments, and level of mobility? These are all important factors needed to help inform employees' career decisions.<sup>3, 6</sup>

### **Support:**

Employers must provide managers and employees with the necessary tools, guidelines, templates, incentives, and strategic internal communication to ensure that both parties are committed to their role in the career development process and understand its importance (see Appendix C). Potential career management resources may include: physical or virtual career development Centers of Excellence, career advisors, training to help managers become better career coaches, employee self-assessments, and career discussion guides.<sup>5, 7</sup>

### **Collaboration and Communities:**

Fostering connections among employees is an excellent way for them to explore career options and help each other to learn and grow. Some of these avenues include professional societies or associations, informal common interest groups, social media platforms, networking events, and mentoring/sponsoring programs.<sup>3, 4</sup>

### **Success stories:**

These testimonials are examples from employees that showcase interesting and varied approaches to career success. Success stories might inspire employees to think about how they could choose to pursue a more creative, individualized career path when contemplating their future aspirations.<sup>3</sup>

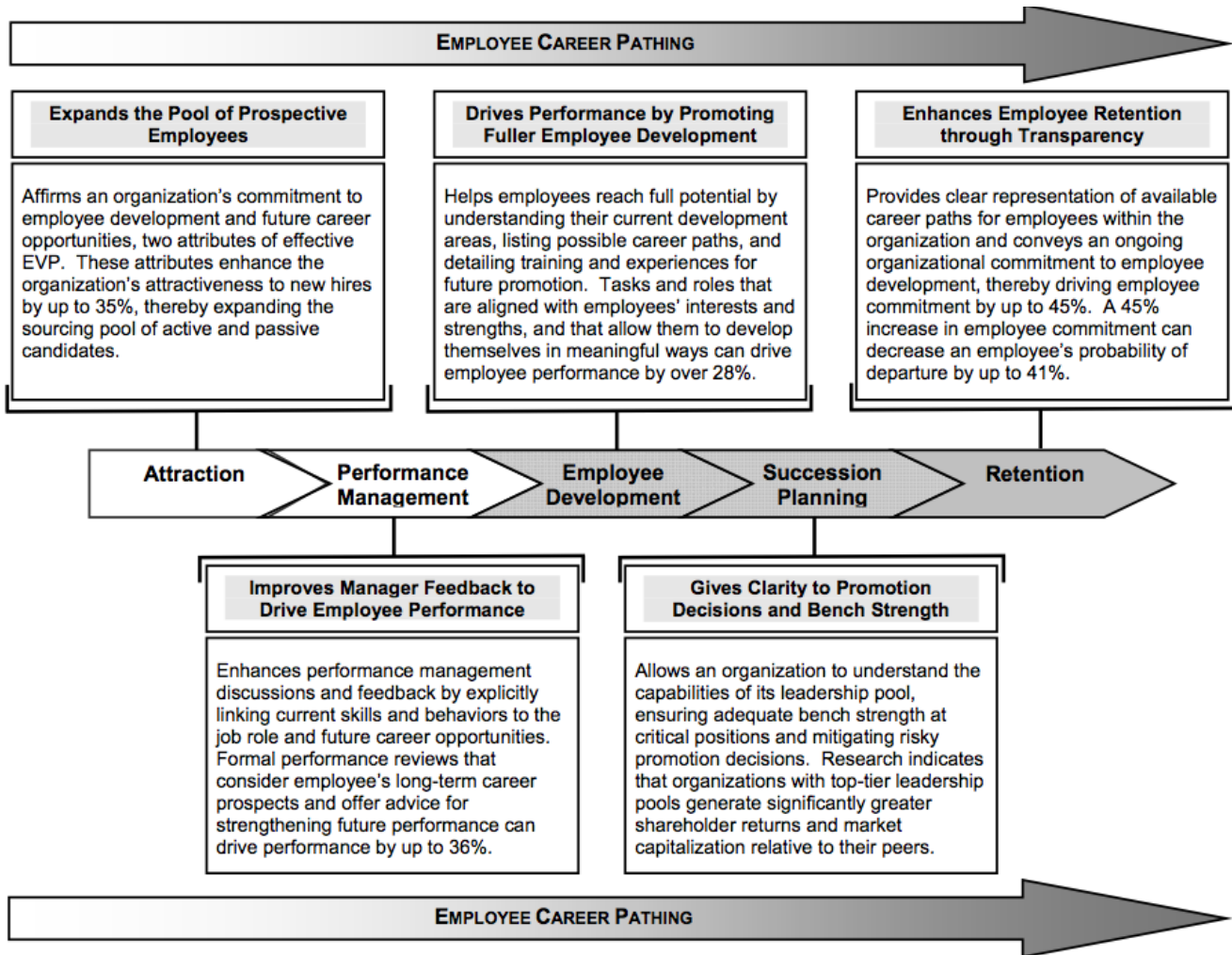
### **Strategic Analytics:**

With an integrated career path process, the foundation for strategic workforce analytics is already in place. Functional competencies linked to career stages tell companies (a) what capabilities are needed to drive a desired change, and (b) what capabilities the workforce actually possesses. The gap between the two provides an organization with a picture of the talent strategies it will need to initiate and drive change.<sup>1</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In today's diverse, global, and technologically savvy work environment, careers are no longer perceived as strictly vertical movements up the rungs of a ladder. Instead, a more appropriate metaphor for one's career path is a rock-climbing wall. You can go straight up the rock face, climb at an angle, or you may choose to go up for a while, move over to find a different path, and then continue on. In a career context, each one of these handholds and footholds could represent a particular role, development experience, or job competency along an individual's career path.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, an effective career path process should be multi-faceted, support each step in the talent management cycle, and align a workforce to the company's future state. In this way, well-crafted career paths with contextualized success factors can play a pivotal role in driving organizational change and building workforce capability.

## Appendix A: Career Pathing Supports Talent Management Cycle



Reference: Career Pathing Processes and Tools

## Appendix B: Example of Vertically-Integrated Competencies

Job Grades/Levels (Designation Process)	Technical Manager						Possible Titles/Roles
Mastery (grades 8-10)							Strategic market leader, technical services manager, practice leader, group leader, office leader, quality manager, lead practitioner, senior program manager (PM4), program manager (PM3), senior project manager (PM2), project manager (PM1)
Practice (grades 7-8)	1	2	3	4	5	6	Group leader, subdiscipline leader, senior project manager (PM2), project manager (PM1)
Foundation (minimum grade 6)							Technical specialist, task manager, project engineer/scientist, task leader
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Doing Technical Work	Managing Projects and Tasks	Managing Technical Professionals	Technical Sales and Marketing	Mentoring and Staff Development	Contribution to Firm's Stature	

Reference: Campbell, B., Cohen, S., Allen, C. P., and Cormidas, S. (2010).

## Appendix C: Providing Support to Enable Successful Career Pathing

Support for Employees		Support for Managers		External Support	
Roadmaps for Success	Discussion Frameworks	Manager Incentives	Individual Development Plans (IDPs)	Communication and Marketing	Career Advisors
Organizations should provide employees with tools to help them complete training and development and meet identified objectives in their career path.	Organizations should offer training or provide templates for employees to facilitate effective career discussions with their managers.	Organizations should reinforce career pathing activities within yearly goals or performance appraisals of managers.	Organizations should provide tips for managers to customize employee IDPs to reflect meaningful, realistic development opportunities.	Organizations should market and communicate the career pathing tool to create top-of-mind awareness for employees.	Organizations often enroll career advisors or mentors (often employees within HR) that assist employees with career management questions.
Examples of Relevant Tactics at Profiled Organizations					
Company D created an employee "Roadmap for Results," a template that details timelines, rationale, and steps for completing career and performance measures.	Company B provides a career discussion template to help employees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize their thoughts</li> <li>• Frame the career conversation</li> <li>• Solicit actionable feedback</li> </ul>	Company A requires all managers to meet specific employee mobility goals, such as moving a certain percentage of employees within their department or into other roles.	Company C's toolkit outlines the following tips for IDP creation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulate goals and expectations</li> <li>• Identify tools and resources to achieve goals</li> <li>• Provide growth to meet required development.</li> </ul>	Company D promotes the career pathing tool during employee orientation and communicates its effectiveness and advantages to managers during performance management communications.	Company A embeds career advisors within business units to provide feedback and leverage social networks to enable individual development and peer support.

Reference: Career Pathing Processes and Tools

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