



# 6 Key Challenges in Designing a Robust Career Development Programme

Two key perspectives on employee engagement are observable when we talk to our clients. Employers, on one side, complain about the lack of engagement from the individuals they hire. On the other hand, one of the top reasons that employees leave an organisation or feel disengaged is that they don't see sufficient career opportunities.

Obviously, there is a multitude of reasons for each viewpoint. But at the end of the day, we arrive more or less at the same conclusion: There is a significant misalignment between employers and employees – and what they expect from each other. After all, how can employees be motivated or engaged if they have nothing attractive and satisfying to which they can aspire? Further, how can employers motivate their employees if they offer nothing innovative in return except a pay check, week after week? To ensure that employees successfully participate and excel at work requires, on the employer's part, a career development programme that meets their needs while providing the talent to achieve the company's goals.

## The Underlying Issue

A win-win situation is possible, whereby employees can take advantage of a satisfying career path that simultaneously moves the company forward. But to reach this point, there must be an understanding of the underlying issue of misalignment. In other words:

- Why does misalignment occur – and continue – between employers and employees at all levels?
- Why is it such a common theme among disparate industries?
- What are the common causes of misalignment?
- And, more important, what can we do to narrow the gap of misalignment between employers and employees?

Over the last 14 to 16 months, we have talked to more than 100 organisations in face-to-face meetings, interviews, workshops, seminars, webinars, and, most recently, through



our initiative – Talent Management Audit Research. We conducted these conversations to better understand the main causes of this misalignment, as well as the implications for career development programmes. The following list, by no means complete or company-specific, represents the common challenges faced by employers today.

**Challenge 1: Redefined Roles.** Almost every company with which we held meetings is going through a process of redefining roles in their organisation. Consider the following:

- Businesses are transforming and, therefore, so are their overall organisations, as companies seek new ways to become more efficient and cost-effective.
- Consumer behaviour is changing in almost every sector, expecting more from the organisations and providing clear feedback (both positive and negative).
- Technology is driving change in many parts of company operations – from product/service design to delivery and thereafter.

- Supplier management, as it becomes more complex, has a huge impact on the way many organisations source their production, which obviously affects both consumers and employees.

With these transitions in mind, the question becomes: Do we, as employers, possess the requisite skill set or talent for these new roles? If not, how do we re-skill or upskill our current employees? This scenario, in return, prompts even more challenges for employees and their careers. For example, are current employees able to transition into these new roles? If not, how can we help them to make a successful move? One solution involves a viable performance appraisal system, as well as an effective and motivational career development programme.

**Challenge 2: Misalignment: Lack of Belief in Mission and Vision.** This dysfunctional situation can exist either within leadership/management or among employees. Both mission and vision are critical and fundamentally important in whatever we do in our organisations.

**”We need better and more sustainable strategies to address the career development programme challenges we face today.”**



If these factors are not transparent and well-communicated, the company lacks the possibility of achieving better performance from both an organisational and individual employee perspective. Needless to say, without a clear mission, one that employees believe in and support, the potential for career development programmes to succeed fades away over time.

**Challenge 3: Leadership Accountability for Attrition.** Organisations want more leadership accountability from management and business leaders when it comes to people management. There is no point in designing a career development programme if leadership does not support it, does not understand how it works, does not care whether it is effective, and does not believe in it. In many cases, when a person voluntarily leaves the organisation, the evident lack of leadership accountability is visible.

But this situation is improving, as more and more companies make leadership accountable for such outcomes. Such progressive companies encourage management to pay more attention to developing talented employees and ensuring

that difficult career development conversations actually take place. The result may well be improved public image, higher market share, happier shareholders, and employee satisfaction.

**Challenge 4: Lack of Self-knowledge and Detachment from Responsibility.** This factor is probably the most important ingredient of any career development programme. The majority of employers with which we spoke expect their employees to be in charge of, or accountable for, their personal and career development in the same way that they expect them to take care of their own health. In other words, they expect employees to be responsible for their skill and career growth and to discover what they lack in terms of self-knowledge – not something very easy and simple to do.

From an employer's perspective, this lack of ownership of one's career is essentially a detachment of responsibility by the employee. When that occurs, it is easy to understand why many career development programmes do not provide the performance results that many companies seek. If employees are self-ignorant



about their qualities and desires, wasting money and time on development programmes is futile. Self-knowledge is critical for the employer-employee relationship.

**Challenge 5: Lack of Long-term Thinking.** This problem, of only solving immediate issues, should not come as a surprise to many people today. Short-term thinking is present in many organisations at all levels, from top to bottom. Unfortunately, without long-term vision and strategy, employers cannot design successful career development programmes either.

If management does not know what it wants to achieve in the future, how can the company attract and hire the requisite talent? Common sense implies that we need to move away from this thinking very rapidly. A combination of short- and long-term planning is essential for both immediate and future success.

**Challenge 6: Unfocused Assessments.** And lastly, there is too much attention on assessments that are too vague. For example, many companies use strength and weakness, or personality, assessments in isolation. Although these

evaluations are all good and necessary, their impact remains very limited (or even negligible) if conducted in isolation. From an individual standpoint, knowing your personality type or your strengths is, of course, beneficial. But, in no way can any of this information alone help an individual significantly progress along the desired career path. Self-knowledge, combined with an assessment of talent the company requires, is a step in the right direction.

### **The Importance of Alignment**

Without an effective balance of vision and need between employer and employee, the cost of misalignment can be significant in terms of wasted resources, ineffective training, misdirected rewards, lower productivity, customer dissatisfaction, and more. All of these results are possible if the company and its workforce do not walk the same path of shared goals.



The many-faceted solution to misalignment requires accountability, clear goals, mutual respect, open dialogue, knowledge, and talent. Without these and other items, neither company nor employee can move toward a sustainable future in which employers offer fulfilling opportunities and employees become and remain engaged – all designed to achieve ultimate business goals. The bottom line is that we need better and more sustainable strategies to address the career development challenges we face today.

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