



Engaging and Developing Talent with Competencies

HOW TO SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS THROUGH COMPETENCY-BASED CAREER DEVELOPMENT





The evolution of career development

Career development has been an integral part of HR for decades—in fact, the term was in use as far back as the 1960s. But underneath a relatively static label, the definition has evolved considerably.

The traditional workplace supported a fairly narrow and predictable formula for career development: employees started at the bottom and climbed the ladder as far as their ambitions and abilities permitted. Career progression was like an escalator that stretched from the first day of work to retirement, with a series of promotions and raises spaced at semi-regular intervals.

Today, an individual's career can look more like a roller coaster—complete with unpredictable peaks, valleys, and changes in direction. Exploring new careers and switching employers regularly is the norm, not the anomaly. According to the [most recent numbers](#) from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, employers can expect to keep an employee for a median of 4.6 years. For organizations focused on retention and loyalty, that is a sobering fact.

At the same time, the way we define career success is changing. Employees no longer measure it exclusively in terms of salary increases or corner offices. Instead, it may take the form of work that aligns with their values, or a job that makes the most of their skills while still enabling them to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Today, employees stay with an employer for a median of 4.6 years.

And while increasingly fragmented and individualistic career pathways and motivations create challenges, when it comes to retention and development, no organization can afford to ignore the issue. The competition for talent is fierce, and the [cost of employee acquisition has never been higher](#). Finding ways to retain and develop the organization's talent is critical.

In this ebook, we will explore some of the biggest talent trends impacting career development today, and examine how competencies can help HR professionals manage the complexities and deliver development programs that meet the needs of both the organization and the individual.

Moving the dial with career development

While building an effective career development program can be challenging, it is also highly rewarding. Career development can move the dial on a wide range of high-priority business areas:

IMPACT ON: BUSINESS EXCELLENCE

Learning and development are shedding their reputation as cost centers within the organization and being re-envisioned as vital, strategic activities. A [Brandon Hall report](#) revealed that the C-Suite is more likely to claim ownership of the learning budget than HR or business unit leaders. Nearly half of companies surveyed (46 percent) placed development at the highest executive level compared to 37 percent of companies that gave the responsibility to HR or business-unit leaders.

And getting strategic about learning and development pays off. [The Great Places to Work Guide to Greatness](#), an annual report that analyzes the FORTUNE 100 Best Companies to Work For, noted that the companies on the list, all of which had made employee development a top strategic priority, were also organizations that had experienced intense growth, with reported revenue rising an average of 22.2 percent over the past 24 months.

Organizations that
prioritize training enjoy
higher profit margins.

Further reinforcing the link between career development and business excellence, [in a study of more than 500 US corporations](#), The American Society for Training and Development found that companies offering comprehensive employee training enjoyed a 24 percent higher profit margin than those who focused less on training.

IMPACT ON: LEADERSHIP

Leadership capacity is a top concern for virtually every organization, and development plays an essential part in helping organizations address the talent gaps and create a strong leadership cadre. In the [2015 Brandon Hall Group's State of Leadership Development Study](#), leadership shortfalls were identified as the single greatest differentiator between high-performance and all other organizations, with 83 percent of organizations rating targeted development for all leader levels as 'important' or 'very important.'

83% of organizations
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These results were echoed in [Deloitte's Human Capital Trends report for 2015](#), in which nearly 9 out of 10 respondents identified leadership as 'important' or 'very important.' However, only six percent of organizations surveyed felt ready to meet their leadership needs. Learning was identified as one of the top three talent challenges, with 85 percent of business and HR leaders reporting that learning was an 'important' or 'very important' problem.

The takeaway is this: companies that are struggling to find leadership talent are recognizing that the solution lies in taking a more active role in developing that talent from within.

IMPACT ON: RETENTION

Retaining talent is an ongoing issue. According to a [recent Gallup poll](#), fewer than 1 in 10 US employees who change jobs stay at the same company. The overwhelming majority, 93 percent, moved to a new company when they change roles, leaving only 7 percent who took a new position within the same company. Not only is this kind of turnover expensive (costing the organization up to 150 percent of an employee's annual salary according to some estimates), but it is a waste of the talent resources the company expended so much time and money to acquire.

Only 7% of employees stay when they change roles

Not every employee's desired career trajectory will fit with an organization's needs or available opportunities. But when a high number of employees need to look outside the organization to fulfill their career goals, it is likely that the way the organization is promoting internal opportunities and supporting employees to take advantage of them is falling short. A commitment to training and career development signals to employees that the company values their talent and is investing in their future. This approach is validated by a [review of the research](#), which found that effective employee training increased employee commitment levels and reduced organizational turnover.

IMPACT ON: MILLENNIALS

Company demographics are undergoing a seismic shift as the Millennial ranks swell from a tiny fraction of the workforce to a clear majority. Today, 35 percent of the North American workforce is between the ages of 18 and 34, and projections for the future suggest that Millennials will comprise anywhere from [one-half to three-quarters of the workforce by 2025](#).

This cohort averages [three times as many job changes](#) as Baby Boomers did at the same age, and a recent survey from Mercer indicates that [44 percent of employees ages 18 to 34](#) are seriously considering leaving their current job, despite reporting high levels of job satisfaction. Prestige, perks, and pay do not entice them to stay longer, but new challenges and opportunities to learn and progress in their careers do. Career progression does not need to be strictly upward, either: it can involve lateral moves into other organizational areas. The most important consideration for Millennials is to feel their talents are being developed and plugged into a meaningful endeavor.

Millennials could make up 75% of the workforce by 2025

Creating flexible development strategies using competencies

While the benefits of career development are clear, the best way to support employee development is not always as straightforward.

Today's workplaces are multi-generational, multicultural, less predictably hierarchical, and more individualistic than ever before, and these characteristics all have implications for development. Flatter organizations multiply potential career pathways, replacing up-and-down 'ladders' with free-ranging 'lattices' that stretch across job families, departments, and other traditional dividing lines. Workforce diversity has made 'one-size-fits-all' development plans a thing of the past. And the growing demand for flexibility, choice, and control now characterizes consumer and employee behavior alike.

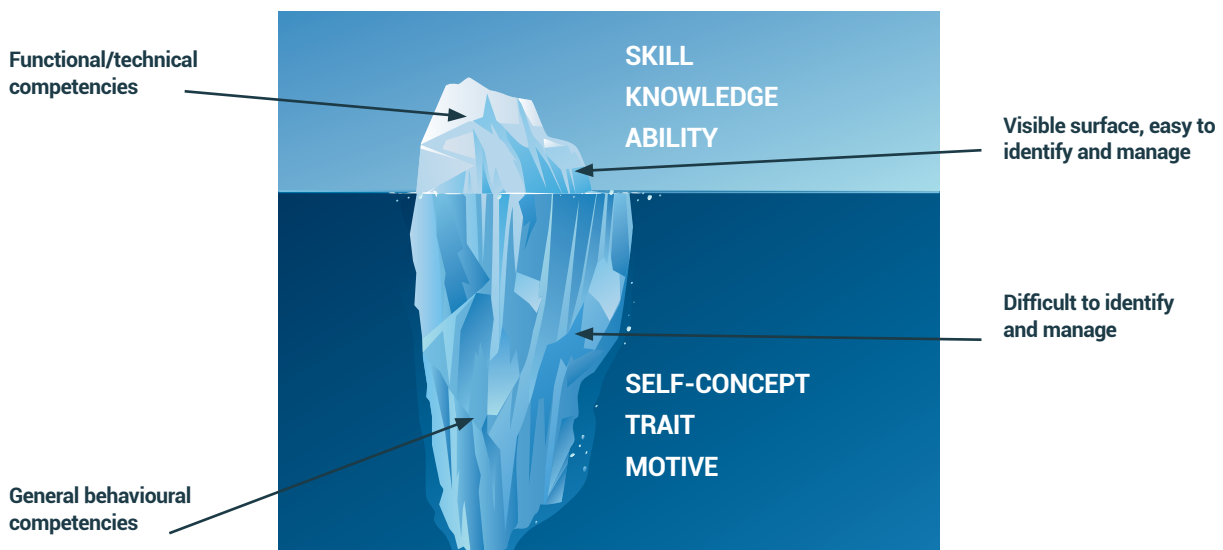
Today's workplaces are multi-generational, multicultural, less predictably hierarchical, and more individualistic.

As a result, managing development activities and finding the right balance between the needs of the organization and the needs of the employee is complex and challenging.

While that complexity is not going away, competencies can help to manage it. Originally used primarily by Fortune 500s, competencies have entered the mainstream in the last decade or so, as new technologies and licensing models have made them affordable, accessible, and user-friendly.

In simple terms, competencies offer enhanced visibility for the **knowledge, skills, abilities, motivations, and traits needed for a specific job**. By translating some of the more hard-to-define job requirements into observable behaviors, competencies enable the organization (and its employees) to understand, measure, and develop these capacities more effectively. And that makes it easier to build career development processes that are transparent, accessible, and empowering.

COMPETENCIES ENHANCE VISIBILITY



More pathways to success for employees

Traditional career development processes tend to organize learning opportunities according to a predictable, upward career progression. For example, a high-performing call-center representative may be given the opportunity to take a management training course in preparation for a promotion to a management position. But if she wants to look at other opportunities across the organization, the pathway will not be as clear. What if she wants to transition into a marketing role? Does she have any competencies that align with an entry-level marketing position? Are there other competencies that she needs to acquire before qualifying for the job? And which development activities will enable her to focus on these gaps?

Breaking each job in the organization down into its component competencies changes the way development programs can be designed and delivered. Instead of limiting development opportunities to specific promotion-based pathways, the program can support a much wider range of possibilities for employees to explore, both upward and lateral. And they support that exploration by making it clear to employees what they need to do to reach their development goal and giving them a range of development options to choose from.





Better use of talent for organizations

Competency-based development benefits the organization as well as the individual. It enhances engagement and retention by giving employees greater career mobility and more control over the direction their career takes.

Using competencies as the building blocks of your organization's development program also enables a clearer view of the organization's talent resources.

When your talent inventory is defined by the jobs people perform, you are only getting half the story. Until those jobs are defined by the competencies that determine on-the-job success, it is almost impossible to see which performers could be transitioned to hard-to-fill or soon-to-be vacant positions. When you quantify gaps at the job level rather than drilling down to the competencies required for the job, it is much harder to quantify the talent you already have and visualize how it can be developed and redeployed within the organization to address those gaps.

With competencies assigned to every job, and development opportunities assigned to every competency, analyzing the organization's talent needs and developing employees in ways that align with organizational goals becomes much easier.

COMPETENCIES ARE...

- **A common language** for talking about talent
- **A way to measure** hard-to-identify traits and motives
- **Easy to see** and understand for everyone
- **Consistently applied** across the organization
- **A framework** that connects every job in the organization

Anatomy of a competency

Let us take a closer look at the 'base unit' for competency-based development—the competency itself. Every competency contains, at a minimum, a definition or high-level description and a series of behavioral indicators, which describe in observable terms how that competency is demonstrated in the workplace.

Some competencies, including those developed by HRSB, are based on a multi-level construction, which means that the competency describes what proficiency looks like at progressive levels of expertise, from basic to advanced. Multi-level competencies are ideal for development programs because:

- They show how the same competency can link jobs requiring the same or different levels of expertise.
- They enable organizations to assign development activities to each proficiency level.
- They give employees a clear development path to follow, whether they are looking to excel in their current role or move into a different role.

Client Focus				
1 Providing service excellence to internal and/or external clients.				
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
Responds to immediate client needs	Maintains client contact	Provides added value	Provides seasoned advice	Ensures continued service excellence
Responds to client needs in a timely, professional, helpful, and courteous manner, regardless of client attitude.	Follows up with clients during and after delivery of services to ensure that their needs have been met.	Looks for ways to add value beyond clients' immediate requests.	Acts as a seasoned adviser, providing independent opinion on complex client problems and novel initiatives, and assisting with decision-making.	Formulates strategies and processes to evaluate emerging and longer-term opportunities and threats to meeting clients' needs.
Shows clients that their perspectives are valued.	Keeps clients up-to-date on the progress of the service they are receiving and changes that affect them.	Addresses the unidentified, underlying and long-term client needs.	Pushes client to consider difficult issues that are in their best interests.	Determines strategic business direction to best meet clients' evolving needs.
Strives to meet service standards in all circumstances.	Maintains service to clients during critical periods.	Enhances client service delivery systems and processes.	Advocates on behalf of clients to more senior management, identifying approaches that meet clients' needs as well as those of the organization.	Evaluates the client service model and service standards to identify areas for improvement.
	Addresses clients' issues in order of priority.	Anticipates clients' upcoming needs and concerns.		

1. The **competency definition** provides a high-level description of the competency.
2. The **proficiency scale** provides multiple proficiency levels for each competency. Each level reflects a progression from a basic demonstration of the competency towards a more complex and strategic demonstration. Proficiency scales help you compare requirements across jobs, which is especially useful when determining potential career paths within the organization.
3. The **notion** for each level provides a high-level summary of the overall theme identified for that proficiency level.
4. A **behavioral indicator** provides a clear description of the observable behaviors that an employee will demonstrate on the job.

Competency-based learning in action

Now let's look at how competencies plug into an organization's development activities. Each job in the organization is defined by a competency-based profile. These profiles are made up of a list of competencies expressed at specific proficiency levels. With competency-based career planning, each proficiency level is connected to a selection of development opportunities.

Employees can see their own job profiles and any other job profile in the organization—from entry level to leadership—and they can explore the learning and development pathway required to achieve various levels of proficiency for a given competency.

This makes the process transparent and accessible. Every employee can clearly see the skills, traits, experience, and knowledge required for any job. They also have a clear understanding of what their own competencies are, and can evaluate their readiness to take on a new role. Most importantly, they can also explore the development pathways that can lead them from where they are to where they would like to be.

Take this example. A client coordinator wants to be promoted. Her profile includes the 'client focus' competency at a level-one proficiency, while the client manager profile specifies a level-three proficiency. She searches the company's competency database and looks for the learning opportunities listed for the level-three proficiency. She sees options that include: a mentorship program, an online 'Customer Service Credentials' course on a recognized massive open online course (MOOC); and, a one-day, on-site workshop offered through the local chapter of the International Customer Service Association. She prefers the flexibility of online learning, so with the approval of her manager, she chooses the online course. When the course is completed, her HR manager updates her personal competency profile to reflect the higher level of proficiency so that when the client manager job becomes available, she can demonstrate that she has achieved the competency level required for promotion.

GOAL	WHERE I AM NOW	WHERE I WANT TO BE
ROLE	CLIENT COORDINATOR	CLIENT MANAGER
COMPETENCIES	CLIENT FOCUS (LEVEL 1)	CLIENT FOCUS (LEVEL 3)
	Planning and organizing (level 2)	Planning and organizing (level 3)
	Self-awareness (level 2)	Self-awareness (level 3)
	Resilience (level 1)	Resilience (level 2)

Competency-based development options

CLIENT FOCUS (LEVEL 1)	CLIENT FOCUS (LEVEL 2)	CLIENT FOCUS (LEVEL 3)	CLIENT FOCUS (LEVEL 4)	CLIENT FOCUS (LEVEL 5)
On-the-job activities: Download activity file.	On-the-job activities: Download activity file.	20 hours of mentorship with a client manager or director	Client relations coaching package	Client relations coaching package II
One-day workshop through Barclay College. See workshop details.	Internal accelerator program	Customer Service Credential course	Client-service excellence conference	Customer Service Training Course II
			Mentorship program	

Getting started

Building a competency-based development program doesn't have to be complicated. But it does require a few steps to develop the framework around which your development resources can be organized.

The process involves three basic steps:

Step 1. Develop a competency architecture for your organization.

Step 2. Create and validate competency profiles for each job you wish to support developmentally.

Step 3. Create career supports by aligning learning resources with each competency.

STEP 1. DEVELOP A COMPETENCY ARCHITECTURE

'Competency architecture' sounds complex, but it is really just a simple set of rules that help you select competencies for every job in a consistent way. It is like a blueprint that ensures each job profile is built the same way and relates to other job profiles across the organization logically and predictably.

An organization's competency architecture can include up to three levels:

Core competencies: These competencies are shared by *every job in the organization*. They define the organization's key values, strengths, and differentiators.

Job-family competencies: These competencies are shared by *a specific group of jobs* that perform common functions and form a logical group for development. (For example, bookkeepers, accountants, and the CFO might all be part of the 'finance' job family and share the same competency for 'cash management'.)

Job-specific competencies: These competencies define what is required to perform a *specific job*. So while 'cash management' might be a competency shared by every job in the finance job family, 'leading change' might be a competency that only the CFO needs to demonstrate.

Competency Architecture	
CORE COMPETENCIES	3 core competencies per profile
JOB FAMILY COMPETENCIES	3 job-family competencies per profile
JOB SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES	2 job-specific competencies per profile

Your organization's competency architecture will reflect unique choices about whether to include all three architecture layers and how many competencies to include for each layer. Once the architecture is in place, you have a structure into which you can add the desired competency content.

STEP 2. CREATE COMPETENCY PROFILES

With your competency architecture in place, you can begin selecting the competencies and proficiency levels for specific jobs in your organization.

These days, few organizations develop their own competencies in house, because it is a costly and time-consuming process that requires specialized expertise in competency-based management. The majority will purchase a [competency dictionary](#) from a respected competency specialist. Competency dictionaries are collections of thematically related competencies. A dictionary may include a collection of competencies that support leadership, for example, or it may contain specialized competencies related to a technical field, such as IT and telecommunications.

To develop a competency profile for a job, you will need to:

- **Collect** background research to help you understand and fully account for the various job requirements.
- **Identify** the competencies and proficiency levels that reflect the job requirements most closely.
- **Validate** the selected competency materials by gathering feedback from job-holders, managers, subject-matter experts and refining the competencies using their input.

You can identify and validate the competencies required for successful job performance using well-researched and proven options such as:

- A card-sort exercise or facilitated discussion with stakeholders to review and prioritize competencies.
- Surveys that gather data about job requirements and feedback on competencies from job incumbents and supervisors.
- Behavioral interviews with job incumbents and supervisors to gather data about job requirements that can be mapped to competencies.
- Job-related materials, including job descriptions, training material, outputs expected in the job (e.g., reports, products), forms and documents used in the job.

	Project Assistant
CORE COMPETENCIES	ACHIEVEMENT ORIENTATION, Level 1 ADAPTABILITY, Level 2 CLIENT FOCUS, Level 1
JOB FAMILY COMPETENCIES	ANALYTICAL THINKING, Level 1 COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT, Level 2 PROJECT PLANNING, Level 1
JOB SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES	QUALITY FOCUS, Level 2 TEAMWORK, Level 2

STEP 3. PERFORM COMPETENCY ASSESSMENTS

Once you have validated and finalized your new competency profiles, the last step involves assessing each employee to see how they perform against the competencies required for the job.

Assessments help to set a baseline for each employee, and that baseline performs two functions. For employees whose performance does not meet the job's competency requirements, the assessment will identify gaps that the employee can overcome with the right development activities. For employees whose performance meets or exceeds the job requirements, the assessment can help identify the next challenge they could work towards within the organization.

Any type of assessment can be applied in this context, including 360-degree, parallel, and self-assessment processes. Regardless of the assessment type, using competencies to articulate the process gives all participants—including the employee being assessed and those providing assessment input—a clear understanding of the specific on-the-job behaviors being assessed. Competencies bring greater clarity and granularity to the assessment process, and when those competencies are linked to development activities, the process also provides that crucial next step by giving employees a choice of development options that will help them reach a specific performance level.

Tips for getting started

- **Tap into expertise.** If you do not have competency experts on staff, consider hiring a competency consultant to help you with the process of setting up your architecture, and selecting and validating competencies for each job.
- **Start small.** If you are exploring competencies for the first time, start with a small pilot program to test the waters, gain familiarity, and gather feedback before adopting a competency-based approach organization-wide. Try developing competencies for a single job family or choosing the organization's core competencies as a more manageable introduction to the discipline.
- **Leverage technology.** Managing competency content across the entire organization can be frustrating if you are relying on spreadsheets or Word documents. Consider using a management platform such as [CompetencyCore](#), which keeps competency content updated and organized.

From ladder to lattice

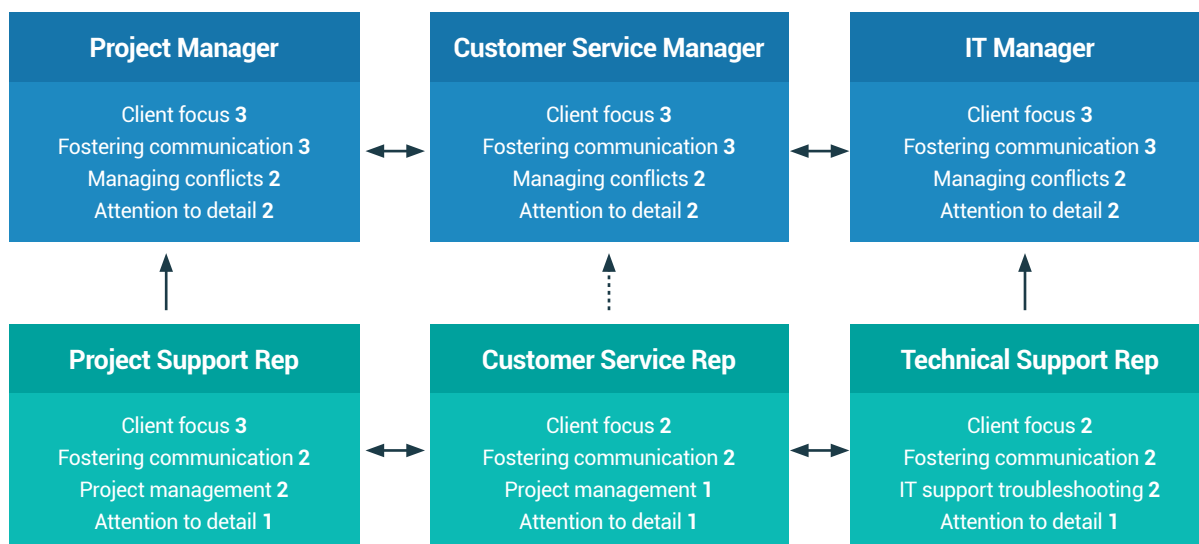
Once competency-based profiles are in place for every job in the organization, you can begin building a development process that supports self-guided development and flexible career latticing.

Conventional 'ladder' career paths are hierarchical and uni-directional: they are limited by the confines of a specific job family or department, and they progress from entry level to senior management. But the combined pressure of flatter organizations and a growing talent crunch make this type of career progression limiting and impractical for both employees and employers.

Because competencies provide a common language to describe skill requirements for every job in the organization, they enable everyone—employees, managers, and HR professionals—to see a wider array of logical career paths across multiple departments and functions. This gives **employees** more options to challenge themselves and **organizations** more opportunities to leverage their talent resources and retain growth-oriented employees effectively.

Here is an example: We can see that a customer-service representative may choose a traditional career path by working towards a management position within the same department. But what if she knows that there will be no opportunities for promotion in the next year or two? In this case, she may choose to prepare for a lateral move into another department where promotional opportunities exist. As you can see, the competency profile for an entry-level technical support position has a very similar makeup. By focusing her development efforts on acquiring technical skills, she can build on her existing skills and prepare for a new, lateral career move. She could also move into project management by continuing to improve her existing 'client focus' skills and acquiring 'project management' capabilities, perhaps by taking her PMP (Project Management Professional) certification.

Giving employees options to learn and grow that go beyond hierarchical, promotion-based career pathways is essential to keeping them challenged and engaged, especially as the opportunities for conventional advancement diminish. It is an especially important consideration for organizations that wish to retain Millennials, who expect to be continually challenged and want to prioritize the acquisition of new skills and experience.



Self-guided development

Career “Lattices” introduce more opportunities into your development processes, but also more complexity. When careers progress hierarchically, there are fewer pathways to identify and chart. When careers can progress along a variety of pathways, the variables multiply significantly.

That is why it is essential to map your learning and development resources to the competencies and proficiency levels in use within your organization. This mapping enables employees and HR professionals alike to clearly see the learning path required for any career move.

While this mapped information can be made available in spreadsheets, guidebooks, intranets, or wikis, it should ideally be managed in a software program that is accessible for all employees and can be easily updated by HR professionals and others.

In addition to ensuring that development resources are mapped to specific opportunities, here are some additional tips to encourage self-guided development:

- **Include a range of development options.** Providing a range of learning options encourages and supports learning styles. For example, some people respond best to one-on-one coaching. Some prefer the convenience of self-paced, online learning. Others learn best within a group dynamic. Making an effort to find a range of alternatives will increase employee participation and engagement levels.
- **Build accountability into the system.** While self-guided development puts primary responsibility on employees to choose their own direction, the organization must still take responsibility for developing accountability frameworks as well as instructional materials and processes to give employees the support they need to self-manage.
- **Record both assessed and validated competencies.** Make sure your development management system is capable of tracking both the individual's assessed competencies and the validated competency profile for the job they perform. An employee's competency profile will evolve each time she completes a development activity, and that information needs to be recorded so that her wider capabilities—and not just those she demonstrates in her current job—are part of the organization's talent records.

8 best practices for development programs

- 1. Support business goals.** While self-guided career development is about empowering employees to take greater responsibility for shaping their careers, the framework of development options needs to align with the needs and priorities of the organization. If the business goal is to retain employees, the development opportunities on offer may be very different than if the goal is to boost profitability, or to reinforce organizational culture.
- 2. Record employee objectives.** Make sure each employee clearly articulates their motivation for developing their career. While those motivating factors may change over time, it is important to record them in a living document to ensure the outcomes reflect their objectives. Do they want to advance to a leadership position? Do they want to stay in the current job and keep their skills and knowledge up to date? Do they want to explore a different career path in a new department or job family?
- 3. Include accountability structures.** Whether it is a monthly meeting with their supervisor, a peer-led group where everyone reports on their progress, or another form of accountability, make sure employees know they are accountable to someone other than themselves when it comes to setting and achieving career-development goals.
- 4. Reward and acknowledge achievement.** Depending on the employee's goal, success may not always come in the form of a promotion or other public achievement. It is important to find ways to acknowledge and celebrate diverse milestones. This could involve having employees log their progress and earn badges along the way based on the number of hours spent on development, the competencies or proficiency levels achieved, or some other metric. Peer support and recognition programs can also be used to acknowledge progress.
- 5. Ensure easy access.** Binders on shelves will most likely sit there gathering dust, and spreadsheets are hard to maintain and update when you have several dozen competencies and hundreds of proficiency levels to manage. Invest in a platform that enables you to easily update the list of learning resources for each competency and proficiency level, and enables employees to access and explore resources at any time, from any location, and preferably on any device.
- 6. Promote and educate.** Ensure that the entire organization, including employees, managers, and executives, understands and supports the new initiative. Develop promotional and instructional materials that address each audience's concerns and outline the expectations. Make sure information about the development program is part of every employee's onboarding or orientation process. Peer support and recognition programs can also raise the profile of the organization's development activities, especially when they are integrated into social networks.

- 7. Integrate development with other processes.** The most successful development programs integrate with other key talent processes, including performance management, succession management, recruitment and staffing, and even compensation and reward. When development is fully integrated, it becomes a powerful support for the full talent-management cycle. For example, it can broaden the hiring pool by identifying candidates who—with a small investment in training—can become high-value, long-term employees. It can turn performance reviews into opportunities to grow and succeed. And it can help organizations deepen their bench strength and support stability by training employees to fill key roles that will be vacant in future.
- 8. Build the case for executive support.** In an [in-depth study of 14 organizations](#) published in *The Journal of Public Sector Management*, 'best-in-class' companies reported that top management's commitment and support was critical to the success of any career management and development system. Getting executive buy-in will help to ensure that your development program is supported, recognized, and widely adopted.

Emerging trends in learning and development

LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

Learning technologies have transformed organizational development activities. MOOCs are now offered by more than 400 universities. Advances in digital media are making engaging, fully immersive training experiences possible with video, interactivity, and simulations. And cloud-based training management systems are enabling organizations to create a complete, customized training ecosystem that organizes external and in-house learning options, enables employees to search, access, rate, and recommend training, and includes inbuilt analytics for measuring the impact of training on the organization in a variety of ways.

LEARNING AS A PROFIT CENTER

In the most progressive companies, learning is being reclassified from a cost center—a resource-intensive business requirement with only an indirect impact on business outcomes—to a profit center. As advanced analytics enable the organization to quantify the positive impact of well-trained, motivated, and internally mobile employees on the bottom line, HR professionals are making the business case for more robust development programs that align with and support business goals.

LEARNING AS CULTURE

Learning and development are increasingly being aligned with organizational culture. In some companies, the same role is now assuming responsibility for both areas. The argument for merging culture-building and development activities under the same banner is twofold. First, learning and development often support key organizational values, such as continual learning, innovation, and embracing change. Secondly, development activities can be chosen to promote and reinforce the desired culture. When competencies are used to manage the development process, core competencies capture the organization's cultural essence and can be linked to a range of development opportunities that are calibrated to the needs of employees at every level—from entry level to leadership.

Prioritizing training and development resulted in:

- 45% higher shareholder returns
- 218% higher income per employee
- 24% higher profit margin

Figures taken from a [Cornerstone On Demand](#) whitepaper and [Business Training Experts](#) whitepapers

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Today's organizations recognize that employees are self-motivated, entrepreneurial, and individualistic. Imposing development activities from the top down can result in learning opportunities that do not align with the learner's motivations, goals, or learning style. A more self-directed model for career development enables employees to provide input on those learning choices, collaborate with colleagues and supervisors, and select the learning opportunities that are best for them. Giving employees the freedom to choose options that suit their learning strengths, their schedules, and their preferred pacing can make a huge difference to learning outcomes as well as engagement levels.



Spotlight on technology

Technology is transforming talent management. Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) and cloud solutions, social and mobile platforms, analytics and big-data capabilities, e-learning and MOOCs, and gamification are just some of the technology trends that are creating new possibilities for development and engagement that did not exist a decade or even five years ago.

At the same time, technology has been shifting away from programs designed to support HR specialists and transactional HR activities towards employee-facing resources designed to encourage engagement, self-service, and peer support.

While all these new options can be exciting, they can also be overwhelming. Here are some key features and capabilities to keep in mind while evaluating development-management technologies:

A user-friendly interface. When HR administrators were the only people using HR software, a less-than-intuitive interface was not a deal-breaker. After all, understanding the technology was part of their job and using the software was something they did on a daily basis. But when the success depends on employee adoption rates, you need to aim for a different standard of usability. If the interface is not simple, intuitive, and attractive, you will never persuade employees to engage with the software.

Mobile compatibility. The mobile trend is impossible to ignore: a recent [Tech Pro Research study](#) revealed that 74 percent of organizations are now using or adopting a bring-your-own-device (BYOD) policy. The 2015 [Citrix Mobile Analytics Report](#) showed that 61 percent of workers report working outside the office at least part of the time, and that employees use more than three devices a day for work activities. HR technology needs to be accessible outside the workplace and compatible with a range of devices.

Analytics. In an article titled, [The Geeks Arrive In HR: People Analytics Is Here](#), Josh Bersin discussed the explosion of interest in HR analytics. While many HR professionals are challenged to identify the data that is meaningful and worth measuring, the potential to understand the workforce more thoroughly and quantify the impact of talent management on key business results is exciting. According to [Bersin By Deloitte research](#), organizations that have the capacity to collect and intelligently apply HR data see improvements in their ability to recruit, build leadership bench strength, and develop their talent.

Integration capabilities. A development-management system that is not capable of integrating with other HR systems will never deliver optimal value. Ideally, the system will give you the ability to flow development resources and data into other key HR activities, such as talent acquisition, performance management, and succession planning. Look for a system that either includes additional modules for these key HR activities or is compatible with a platform that supports this type of integration.



With multi-level competencies, you have clearly defined behaviors that are expected at different jobs or job levels. The clarity of those definitions facilitates an objective evaluation for the manager, and provides a framework for meaningful discussions between the manager and the employee.

~Lorraine MacKay, Senior Vice-President,
Human Resource Systems Group

Self-assessment checklist

Does your career development program follow best practices? Measure its effectiveness against this checklist.

We have a system in place that:

- ☐ Empowers employees to set and achieve personal goals and aspirations
- ☐ Enables employees to explore potential career ladders (opportunities for promotion)
- ☐ Enables employees to explore potential career lattices outside their department or job family
- ☐ Enables employees to see where there are gaps in their current job performance
- ☐ Provides a selection of learning and development options that are focused on closing those gaps
- ☐ Makes it easy for employees to access and explore development options and resources
- ☐ Supports a range of learning styles and preferences—formal, informal, visual, experiential, etc.
- ☐ Includes a range of development options, including mentorships, massive open online courses (MOOCs), conferences, on-the-job learning, etc.
- ☐ Gives employees a clear understanding of the skills and experience they need to develop to reach a desired career goal
- ☐ Integrates development resources and data with other key HR activities
- ☐ Supports key business goals, such as engagement, retention, leadership development, etc.
- ☐ Includes a review process to measure the impact of career development activities at the individual and organizational levels
- ☐ Positions continuous learning and development an essential part of the organization's culture
- ☐ Gives employees a means of recording career development goals and tracking their progress
- ☐ Includes accountability structures, such as manager check-ins or peer accountability
- ☐ Can be updated easily to include new learning or development opportunities
- ☐ Receives positive feedback from employees, managers, and executives alike
- ☐ Includes a process for recognizing and celebrating milestones and achievements

0-4 Catching up: If you scored four or less, you have some catching up to do. While you are to be commended for making learning opportunities available to employees, you may benefit from a more strategic approach to development.

5-9 Industry average: If you scored between five and nine, you are committed to the development of your employees and keeping pace with your peers. You are making an effort to include a variety of learning styles, and balancing the needs of employees with the needs of the organization.

10-17 Leading the pack: If you scored between 10 and 17, you are leading the way in delivering development options that are self-guided and engaging, supported by the appropriate technologies, and plugged into your organization's broader strategic goals.

Take the first step

If your organization needs to build a more flexible, engaging career-development program and you'd like to learn how competencies can help, contact **1-866-574-7041** or email info@hrsg.ca.

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