

Developing talent in Life Science organisations – Challenging the concept of a traditional career

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Recently, the concept of a traditional career is being challenged, which in turn is steering companies toward constant learning experiences that allow employees to build skills quickly, easily, and on their terms. These new learning models are challenging the traditional concept of a static career and reflect the decline of skills critical to the twenty-first-century organisation.

Essentially, talent development activities should not focus solely on optimising performance for the individual employee's current role but also should encompass long term business needs. Organisations should ensure a variety of development activities are available for their employees. Ultimately, talent development should be seen as a key success factor for the organisation.

Recent CIPD research suggests that more than two-fifths of employees strongly agree or agree that their organisation provides them with opportunities to learn and grow and additionally, more than two-fifths of employees are satisfied with the opportunity to develop their skills in their job, proving that organisations are utilising learning and development as an organisational tool. The most popular forms of training remain as on the job and peer-led, proving the 70/20/10 training model remains as effective as ever. Interestingly, respondents to my study note the utilisation of on the job training as well as coaching and mentoring rather than leaning solely on formal learning. This shows concurrence with recent literature suggesting that the concept of a traditional career is being challenged, which in turn is steering companies toward constant learning experiences. As discussed by one of the respondents in my study:

There is a natural tendency for people, when they sit down to do a career development plan, to say that they need to do a Masters or Diploma. In actual fact, we are saying yes, that is legitimate, but what about joining a

project team or taking on more ownership of tasks? People are now responding to those challenges because it's not all about the formal learning, it's about the on the job training and I think coaching goes some way at addressing this also because you are trying to change people's behaviours.



On the job training, as deemed the most popular learning and development option in a recent CIPD report, on its own can increase productivity by twenty-eight per cent. When combined with coaching and mentoring, however, it can increase productivity by 88%. Additionally, organisations with a strong learning culture are 92% more likely to develop novel products and processes, 52% more productive, 56% more likely to be the first to market with their products and services and 17% more profitable than their peers. Their engagement and retention rates are 30% to 50% higher. Further proving the importance of learning and development as an element of the overall Talent Management strategy, a recent HR Practices in Ireland report lists learning and development as a top action necessary to retain talent. A recent study by Glassdoor revealed that, for Millennials, the ability to learn and progress within the organisation is currently the main driver when considering opportunities. Only one-third of Millennials, however, believe that the organisations they work for are utilising their skills to the best of their ability and 42%

would be likely to leave the organisation they work for if they are not learning at a fast enough pace.

Focusing on career development, clear links have been established between coaching, high performance and readiness for development. A Bersin by Deloitte study attests that there is a significant correlation between the presence of a coaching culture to develop internal talent and high levels of engagement, therefore also retention. McKinsey sums up what is primarily needed in terms of talent development as being:

A deep-rooted conviction, among business unit heads and line leaders, that people really matter -- that leaders must develop the capabilities of employees, nurture their careers, and manage the performance of individuals and teams.

In reality, however, organisations can struggle to create a culture of coaching amongst its managers and succession planning, in its traditional sense, is not sufficient to identify the skill gaps and prepare an aspiring leader. Only 5% of organisations are confident in their managers' abilities to foster employee development across the organisation. It must be cautioned against promoting individuals that are not prepared for the role of manager due to the danger of losing technical capabilities and gaining a subordinate manager in one transition. This caveat also appears in the opinions of industry leaders who participated in my study:

We are very conscious of the fact that there is a huge difference between a technical leader and a people leader. Not everybody is naturally gifted at leading people or being technical.

While many leaders and managers understand the importance of developing their talent, few follow through with effective delivery. Ultimately, leadership development happens most effectively in a business context, not just in training sessions. No matter how much organisations focus on delivering sophisticated training programs, if prospective leaders are not immersed in a workplace that supports leadership development objectives, such efforts will likely produce limited returns. The reason behind why the literature suggests this is the case may be provided by one of my study respondents, who notes:

The challenge comes when you actually realise we believe we might have a succession plan but we haven't looked at the skills of those people. The succession plan is just logical in that this person is next in the pecking order, but he or she may not have the required skills to succeed.

Organisations are finding it difficult to strike the balance between identifying a mixture of internal talent and sourcing external talent for positions available and therefore, lean more toward external candidates when recruiting. With just over one-fifth of individuals who are considering looking for a new job motivated by promotion opportunities elsewhere and 33% of employees feel they are unlikely to fulfil their career aspirations internally, organisations must amplify career development opportunities for existing employees.



Overall, learning and development is an area that appears to be largely well dealt with in the five organisations represented in my study, with opportunities for on the job training, coaching and formal education. This is not a major revelation but one that is welcome. Learning and development is quite a traditional activity of the HR department and one that should be well established and in existence in all organisations. As mentioned, the literature suggests that alongside changing careers, learning, and development needs to revolutionise. HR is preparing itself for this change and allowing for training focused on the longer-term business direction, as opposed to focusing solely on short term needs.

Interestingly, although learning and development is an area that is done well for employees, this does not correlate to building the knowledge and abilities of Line Managers in deploying Talent Management strategies. Perhaps organisations assume that when talent reaches a managerial level, their abilities should be at a level to support activities supporting personnel; however, as indicated throughout my study, this is not the

case. Action is needed to increase the support to Line Management to increase their effectiveness and to improve overall organisational success.