

Talent, Careers and Organisations: Where Next?

“Managing human capital is a misnomer. Humans are ‘beings’. We want to be known and valued for who we are, and our aspirations and ambitions recognised and seen as important. It’s a missed opportunity for an employer not to attend to these needs and thereby reap the productivity gains that accrue from more motivated, loyal employees.”

Jonathan Cormack, Head of OD, Standard Chartered Bank.

Executive Summary

1 Our findings and recommendations are primarily based on interviews with 67 employees in organisations across different sectors and countries, an on-line survey and interviews with over 30 HR leaders, and other interviews with subject experts. This enables us to offer many practical recommendations which are captured in our Six Dimensions of Career Management Model.

2 Anticipated recovery from the global economic crisis has heightened concerns about attracting, developing and retaining talent. Specific pinch points for organisations vary, but there are clear business imperatives for having a stronger focus on career management.

It is one of the few ways to raise motivation and engagement - even when pay increases and bonuses may be in short supply. The benefits extend beyond designated talent pools to all employees, though the nature of support will vary.

3 Careers still matter. Nearly all employees we interviewed talked enthusiastically about their future aspirations. We were struck by their commitment to work and recognition that 'you get out what you put in'. The message that individuals need to own their careers was well-understood and accepted by all respondents.

4 The main employee challenges include finding out about opportunities in other parts of the business, encouraging the organisation to take a risk on them if they do not have the exact skill set for a role, and coping with inconsistency in managers' coaching capability.

5 Given these challenges, we advocate a move to a more effective, partnership-based approach to career management. This does not have to be 50-50, but our research reveals very specific

areas where employees need targeted support - facilitating moves across different parts of the business, for example.

Many talent management processes focus on assessment and succession planning - typically being based on organisation needs and assumptions versus a real understanding of individual motivation and career aspirations. Working closely on individuals' career development can help build a powerful attraction and retention strategy.

6 This can only develop in a culture that values time spent on personal development and sees it as a strategic imperative - there are no short cuts to achieving lasting career management benefits. Tools and processes can help, but the attitudes and behaviours of senior managers influence the emotional commitment to stay with an organisation. It's about bringing humanity back into organisations - relating to people as people not as resources.

7 The line manager is one of a network of people who employees talk to about their careers. However, at times, managers can feel ill-equipped for such discussions, partly because of a lack of knowledge. Many employee respondents valued access to a mentor from a different part of the business, with whom they felt they could be more open.

8 HR seems to be relatively removed from career conversations, except at very senior levels or where there are local talent managers. Typically, HR contributions focus on process and tools rather than engaging with individuals. There is a danger of head office HR functions being out of touch with what's happening on the ground - and being too focused on process design.

9 A good career conversation lies at the heart of effective career management - careers, after all, are a deeply personal matter, based on values and expectations. In this respect, generational differences may not be as pronounced as we might expect.

Everybody values the opportunity to talk to someone they trust, who can both challenge and inspire. A more useful approach may be to recognise that everybody is different and to treat them as individuals - not as an age bracket.

10 Our research revealed some organisations tackling their specific pinch points. For many, it is work in progress with no easy answers. What they have in common is a willingness to look at the issue from both an organisation and employee perspective. They work with employees to identify solutions, recognising that it is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

11 Some on-line career processes and tools are a useful starting point, but respondents often described them as 'too cold' - unless they were accompanied by more personal debrief conversations. Employees are asking for simple and easily accessible tools - many find corporate intranets hard to navigate with too much information.

More engaging uses of intranet solutions include on-line mentor databases with accompanying videos and stories. Increasingly, social networking sites are becoming a powerful medium for employees to involve others in their career development.

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