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TALENT:

CAREERS, DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

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CAREERS, DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Gillian Pillans

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COMMENTARY

This CRF report indicates that the process of building future skills and capabilities should be a partnership between organisations and their employees. Given the changing landscape, developing current and future leaders must encompass reskilling and reviewing the competencies related to great leadership.

More flexible patterns of working mean that the traditional approaches to climbing the career ladder may be redundant. Succession is no longer about people moving up the organisation but rather finding ways to support talent to develop and to help the organisation meet its objectives. Considering what type of support needs to be given is an essential part of creating clarity around what development needs to look like. This report indicates that organisations are working to segment populations to provide more targeted activities and support.

Organisations must also consider who is best suited to lead conversations around succession, development and readiness, and provide training for managers in this area. Developing processes to enhance the quality of development conversations can help an organisation understand its employees' motivations and aspirations. What are they striving for and how does this impact behaviour and ultimately their success and the culture of the organisation?

The role of coaching and mentoring, and how managers and leaders are rewarded for nurturing rather than hoarding talent are also important factors. If managers are reticent to lose their best performers, they stifle organisational growth and risk losing people altogether, usually to competitors. By proactively evaluating rising stars and identifying them for development, organisations will bolster their ability to deal with sudden paradigm shifts. Testing and evaluating leaders' ability to lead others through change and uncertainty helps create the agility needed to respond quickly and effectively.

The impact of technology is another key theme in CRF's analysis. Technology capability has been a regularly reported deficit at C-suite level and Covid-19 has amplified this problem. Progressive organisations leverage technology as a competitive advantage while leaving others floundering. Being able to put tools and resources in the hands of individuals is powerful, however, how they are supported will also be important.

Starting at talent acquisition and building consistent approaches to recruiting, onboarding and developing individuals is a prerequisite to setting development and succession planning up for success. Having clarity of how the organisation defines talent and building skills so that quality conversations about talent development can take place are essential.

This is not just an HR issue. It is an organisational one, requiring a co-ordinated approach.

Chris Humphreys, CEO, Advanced People Strategies

Developing talent has never been so important, and the Covid-19 pandemic has focused even more attention on the need to adapt and change. However, what endures is that how organisations acquire, assess and develop talent can be a real source of competitive advantage.

COMMENTARY

With events unfolding so quickly in 2020, agility has become a number-one priority for most organisations. In today's climate, the ability to adapt spells the difference between failure and success, between followers and innovators. HR plays a pivotal role in this as it deals directly with an organisation's most important and flexible resource: talent.

The main challenge for HR is keeping your employees in the driver's seat while making sure they're heading in the same direction as your organisation. CRF's talent report outlines a number of current pitfalls and shortcomings in blending personal and organisational aspirations. Examples include a lack of developmental culture, disproportionate pressure on line managers, and failing to communicate about company goals and available career support.

Out with the old, in with the new

There are, however, ways to successfully point empowered talent in the right direction. An emphasis on progress management is one of them. This approach replaces periodic assessment cycles, such as annual reviews, with a more continuous talent management strategy. Such a strategy enables day-to-day feedback, proactive coaching and strengths-based development plans – all realised in an environment of trust.

By maintaining an open dialogue, your employees are clear about where the organisation is heading, which roles are best suited for them on that growth path, and how you can help them get there. With support ranging from targeted training and workshops to temporary reassignments and job enrichment, HR can create a framework to give employees control over their careers. Tracking progress then determines whether adjustments are advisable along the way.

A progress management approach links to many of the recommendations mentioned at the end of this report, such as the need for continuous improvement, effective communication and an improved connection between business strategy, talent and careers. Moreover, it allows you to support future skills needs and to make sustainable employability one of your trademarks.

In a period of dramatic change, embrace the potential for HR to inspire futureproofed careers, and remember, there is no time like the present.

Cathy Geerts, Chief Human Resources Officer, SD Worx

AUTHOR

Gillian Pillans has worked as a senior HR practitioner and OD specialist. Prior to her HR career, she was a management consultant and is also a qualified solicitor. As Research Director, Gillian has written various CRF reports on subjects including HR strategy, organisation design and development, leadership development, talent management, coaching and diversity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT CRF

Founded in 1994, Corporate Research Forum (CRF) is a membership organisation whose purpose is to increase the effectiveness of the HR function, in order to drive sustained organisational performance, through developing the capability of HR professionals. Through more than twenty years of research and the expertise of our team, we have developed a deep understanding of the ways HR can contribute to business outcomes, what works, what doesn't, and in what circumstances. With a network of over 200 leading organisations, we continue to grow as the respected focal point and knowledge source for improving corporate and individual performance.

We support our members in enhancing their personal capabilities and building organisational effectiveness, guiding them through topics relevant to success, identifying actionable insights and practical recommendations, and facilitating networking opportunities. Our work helps organisations and the HR function make sense of the environment in which they operate, and develop capacity to deal with continuous uncertainty.

We explore topics through an evidence-based lens, highlighting practices that enable the function to deliver business value, and sometimes critiquing existing practices. Our approach is rooted in the principle that adults learn best through action, experimentation, discussion, reflection and interaction with others.

For more details on how your organisation can benefit from CRF membership please contact Richard Hargreaves, Commercial Director, on +44 (0) 20 3457 2640 or at richard@crforum.co.uk. Alternatively, please visit our website at www.crforum.co.uk.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
KEY TAKEAWAYS

1

In a constantly changing business context, talent and careers are high on the agenda for business and HR leaders alike.

Many organisations are rethinking how they manage talent and what the concepts of 'career' and 'career development' mean today. The changing workforce, new business strategies, the need for agility in the face of disruption and the emergence of new technologies in the talent field are key drivers.

2
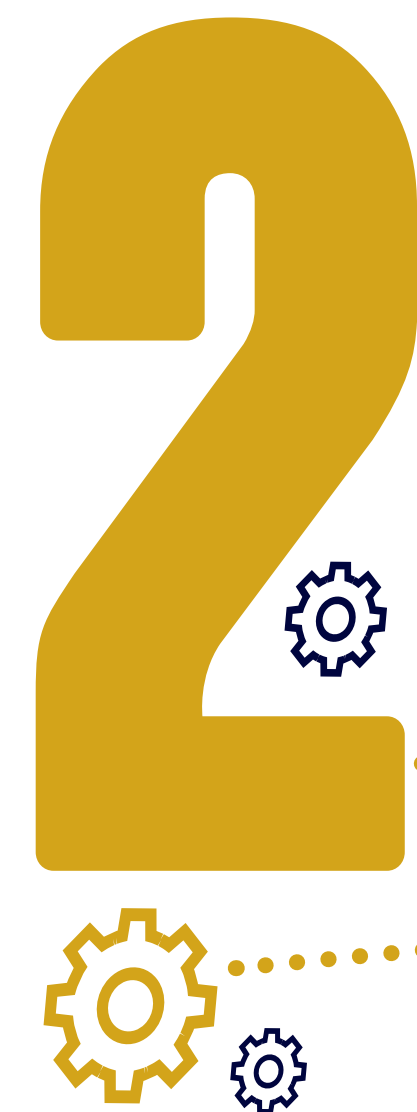
Activities around talent and careers need to focus on developing the future capabilities required to build and transform the business and execute new strategies.

However, our research finds a substantial gap between aspiration and delivery. Only a minority of organisations judge their career activities to be fairly or highly effective at supporting future skills needs. This is a concern, given that many organisations will need to reskill their workforces over the coming years. A key action for organisations is to make sure the outputs of the business strategy and workforce plan feed directly into talent and career development processes, so people know what skills will be needed in future and how they might acquire those skills.

3

For all the rhetoric about individuals being responsible for their own career development, HR largely views careers as a partnership between the individual and the organisation.

However, organisations don't always communicate well enough the career support that's available to employees. This can lead to employees interpreting 'you are responsible for your career' as 'you are on your own'.

4

Organisations tend to rely – and even over-rely – on line managers to do the heavy lifting in leading careers conversations and supporting staff in their development.

However, managers are often ill-equipped for this task, and many organisations are failing to sufficiently prepare and support their managers to do this well. An alternative approach is to improve access to other forms of career support in addition to the line manager, such as career workshops, career coaching, mentoring or communities of practice.

5
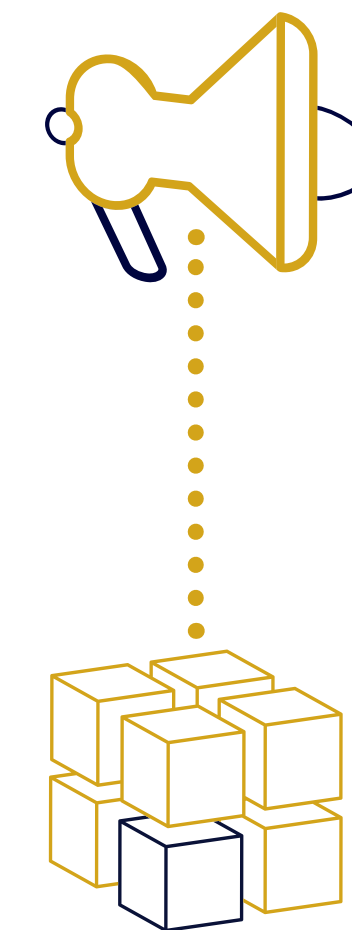
Individuals need skills and support if they are to fulfil their side of the career partnership bargain.

This will become more pressing as the workforce ages and people look to reskill and retrain multiple times over a lifetime. However, for most employees, career development support – to the extent it is provided – is relatively low-touch and often delivered online. High quality, professional support tends to be reserved for high potentials and leadership populations. However, online delivery is beginning to make it more affordable to deliver personalised support at scale.

6

Many organisations are unclear about HR's responsibility for delivering career development.

Few organisations have someone sufficiently senior whose role is focused on careers, and often the talent, L&D and careers agendas aren't well integrated.

7

Talent, succession planning and career development should be interconnected, but often don't fit well together.

All elements of the talent supply chain need to focus on identifying and developing future skills while enabling people to access job experiences and learning to help them develop those skills.
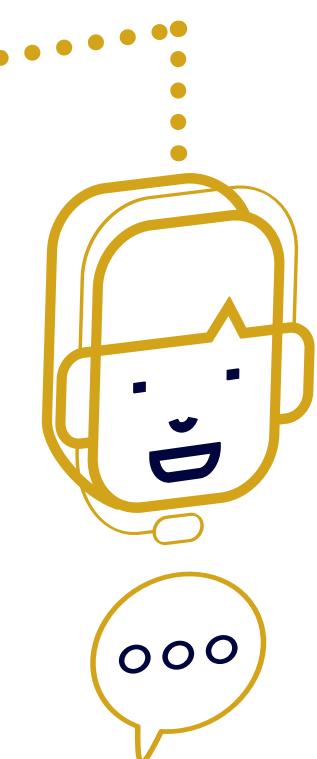
8

Experiences are essential to career progression.

An effective career development strategy needs to describe how people can identify the experiences they need to develop their career, and how to access those experiences, whether it's through internal 'gigs', project assignments, or permanent job moves.

9

One of the major developments in the talent space is an explosion of new technology platforms and solutions.

These are promising in terms of increasing the transparency of skills in the organisation, supporting internal mobility and networking, integrating the L&D and talent agendas, providing personalised self-help tools for career planning, and providing better management information.

10

A key question is whether the organisation climate supports development

This is essential, and requires ongoing commitment and attention from HR and business leaders. Whether or not you have a developmental culture is not determined by what leaders say, but whether they back up words with actions such as making developmental moves and facilitating internal mobility.

We introduce the **CRF Integrated Career Development model,** which brings together all the elements needed to deliver an effective system for careers.

It describes how talent and careers sit within the broader strategic and cultural context of the organisation and how they connect with other people processes. The key message is that, in order to be effective, the different elements of the career system have to be aligned. You can use the model to assess your current practice and identify opportunities for improvement.

11

12
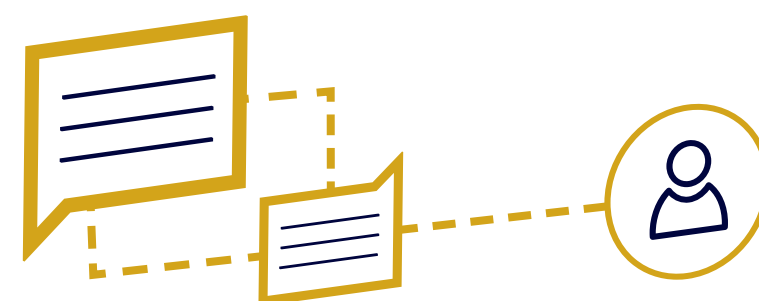
There is no shortage of good ideas in the careers and talent space, but one of the main barriers to success is a lack of sustained focus and follow-through.

Choosing to do a few things well, and sustaining effort over time, may be a better approach.

01

INTRODUCTION – WHAT'S DRIVING THE EVOLUTION IN CAREERS, DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION?

01
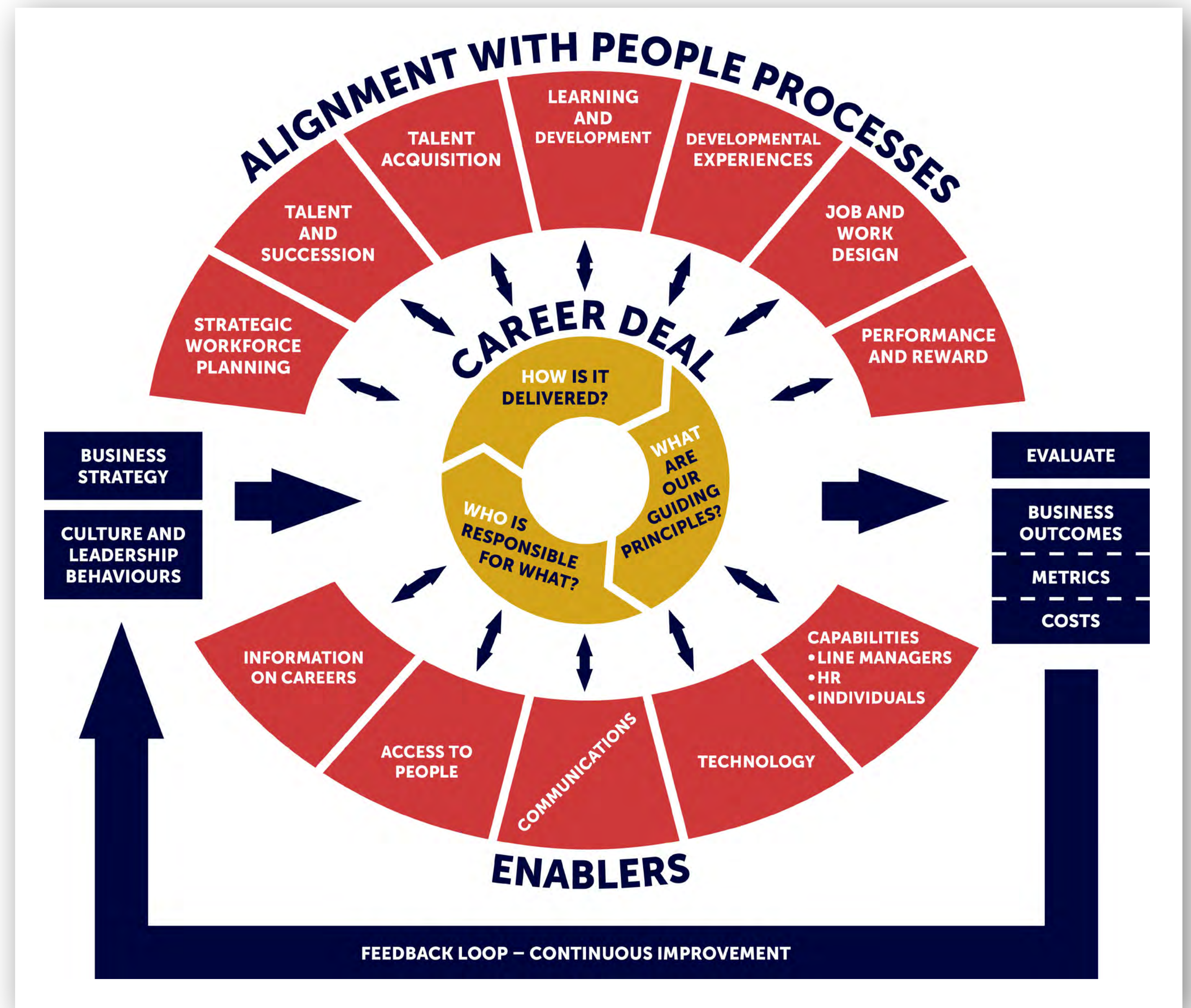
INTRODUCTION – WHAT'S DRIVING THE EVOLUTION IN CAREERS, DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION?

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"The career model of the future is a world where people can work, learn, and progress all the time. In other words, a way to manage people so they know what they want to do next, the company offers lots of development and support in doing so, and new career opportunities are made available as part of everyday life."

Josh Bersin

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, talent was at or near the top of the agenda for business and HR leaders. Digital transformation has become a mantra for organisations, driving companies to develop new business models and strategies and highlighting the need to invest in human and organisational capabilities. Business leaders have to carefully consider what it will take to succeed in this new business context, whether their organisations have the skills and resources required, and choose whether to build or buy to fill capability gaps.

This is proving to be both an opportunity and challenge for HR. It's an opportunity for HR to step up and play a business critical role in equipping the organisation for the future. It's also an opportunity for HR to rethink talent strategies, and to decide how to exploit emerging technologies that offer much promise. Yet it's also a challenge, as there are many possible talent strategies to choose from, and HR's track record in talent management is mixed.

Our research suggests many HR functions are stepping up to this challenge by rethinking their approaches to talent management in general, and career development in particular. The purpose of this report is to help guide this thinking, by examining the business drivers for new talent strategies, assessing current and emerging practice, and making recommendations about how to proceed.

One of the key findings of our research is that the business context is driving a fundamental rethink in the concept of 'careers' and 'career development' in many organisations. Careers is a topic that's attracting attention and while this trend was already underway, the pandemic is accelerating it. This paper focuses on understanding how organisations are thinking about careers, how they are supporting employees in developing their careers, and how career development connects with critical talent processes such as succession planning.

01

INTRODUCTION – WHAT'S DRIVING THE EVOLUTION IN CAREERS, DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION?

> "Often, employee surveys show that people don't know how to build a career in the organisation, or are unclear what the opportunities are."
>
> David North, Leadership and Career Development Consultant

We see the following key drivers influencing how companies are thinking about talent and careers:

- **Future skills and the availability of talent is a key concern for the whole executive team,** not just HR. Research by PwC found that 79% of global CEOs say they're 'extremely' or 'somewhat' concerned about the availability of key skills. Several of the companies we interviewed said a key driver for rethinking their approach to career development was that their CEO had made it a strategic priority.

- **Organisations need to be prepared for an anticipated workforce shift** as technology, automation and artificial intelligence fundamentally reshape the nature of work and the skills required for digital transformation. We are reaching a point where many of the skills that were in abundance are becoming obsolete. Many of our interviewees cited 'future of work' as a key business issue driving people strategy for their organisation.

- **The ageing and changing shape of the workforce, shrinking working population and global demographic shifts** have been well documented ([see here](#)). Companies need to develop new capabilities, for example in data and digital, but may not find it easy to hire in those skills.

- Organisations also have to consider their **responsibility for reskilling and redeploying parts of the workforce which are displaced** due to technological change or the impact of recession. This means building the capacity to reskill and redeploy people at scale.

- **Creating a diverse workforce** and developing an inclusive working environment to attract and retain diverse talent has been moving up the business agenda for some time, although progress has been slow. Companies are increasingly recognising the need to embed objectives around D&I into how they approach career development and succession.

- While developing an 'agile' and 'flexible' workforce was already a key objective for organisations, **the pandemic has underscored the need for fluidity in talent.** Organisations have been forced to change working practices, and in many cases entire business strategies, in a matter of days or weeks. Strategies for career development need to incorporate creative ways of allowing people to develop new skills that don't involve moving to a different permanent position. Increasingly it's about 'gigs', short-term work assignments and projects done on the side of an individual's principal job role.

- **Technology in the talent space is moving fast.** Products and platforms promise to make it easier for employers to understand the talent and skills they have – making talent more discoverable – and better connect people with opportunities to develop their skills and progress their careers. Many of the organisations we interviewed want to be more transparent about internal opportunities, but struggle to maintain up-to-date information on the skills profile of the workforce.

- **Career development is a key element of the employer brand and EVP.** Many of the companies we interviewed are rethinking career development in response to employee engagement data that shows people don't know how to build a career in the organisation, or are confused about the opportunities available. Career development is also an important element of retention for many organisations. For example, LinkedIn's 2020 Talent Trends Report found that employees at companies with high internal hiring stay 41% longer compared to those with low internal hiring. Mercer's 2020 Talent Trends research found that one in three employees who are satisfied in their current role are still planning to leave due to a lack of career options. Many organisations report that the main reason high performers cite for leaving is a lack of career progression or development.

- **The expectations of employees are shifting.** Employees have become accustomed to the seamless experience and algorithm-driven recommendations of shopping on Amazon or watching Netflix, and expect similar consumer-grade technology at work. Organisations have to manage a tension between employees' desire for clear, transparent career paths and the reality that career progression is often messy and unpredictable in practice. One way to square this circle is to draw broad career narratives that explain the types of career paths that are available to people in the organisation, and map out experiences that people might seek out in order to progress along those paths.

01

INTRODUCTION – WHAT'S DRIVING THE EVOLUTION IN CAREERS, DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION?

WHAT IS A CAREER AND HOW DO CAREERS DEVELOP?

A career can simply be the sum total of the various jobs a person does throughout their life. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary defines career as a person's "course or progress through life". However, this report assumes that careers **can** develop and progress, and development and progression are more *likely* when careers are actively managed, whether through the actions of the individual, the employer or a partnership of the two. Progression does not necessarily mean a continuous upward trajectory into ever more senior roles. It can involve sideways moves to develop breadth, or developing within an existing role by taking on additional responsibilities. We find this reflected in the language organisations use today around careers – 'pathways' and 'lattices', for example, rather than career 'ladders'.

When we look at how people develop through their career, we can think of work and learning as two sides of a coin. On one side, you develop skills through learning and practice on the job. Your career helps you develop because you learn by doing. On the other side, what you learn builds the platform from which you can progress your career and thus build new skills. It's therefore important that career planning addresses both sides of the coin. Career development needs to consider not only the jobs that an individual will do, but also the experiences they should accumulate along the way. Marc Effron, President of Talent Strategy Group, suggests employers should make experiences the language of development. Rather than building career maps, focus on creating experience maps for each function. According to Effron: "An experience map describes the five to ten key experiences that are the building blocks of success for a function. To create a development plan from an experience map, you identify which experiences are still needed for job or career growth and find the project, exposure or assignment that will most quickly build that experience." This means answering questions such as:

- What experiences do you need to achieve to succeed in this role or advance to another?
- What development experience do you need to accumulate in the next year?
- What options are available to access that experience?
- How will you measure the success of that experience?

For example, the home improvement retailer Kingfisher has discovered that career pathways can quickly go out of date when you have a change of leadership or strategy. "We've found a better way is to focus on the experiences you need to accumulate in order to reach the end goal," said Vishal Thanki, Group Talent Director. "It's not so much about which jobs you need to do, it's about working out the bits that are missing and finding ways of building the experiences to get there. For example, if you haven't worked closely with customers, being a retail director or store manager will help build that experience. Or perhaps you have store experience but need to run a major change programme, so your next move should focus on that."

There are several themes we will return to throughout this report:

- **Skills are the critical currency around careers today.** Skills have always been important, but technology is driving focus away from 'jobs' towards a more skills-centric view of careers. The new tools allow career progression and learning to be increasingly decoupled from specific jobs. They assess and infer skills and match them to opportunities in the organisation.

- The broad workforce shift that's expected over the next few years, and which is likely to be accelerated by the Covid-19 crisis, means many organisations will have to put in place **purposeful initiatives around developing, reskilling and redeploying their people.** Having a well-crafted careers infrastructure, that flows from the business strategy, enables individuals to drive their own future and allows the organisation to support them in their endeavours, will be an essential element of the response required.

- Although the long-term trend is towards individuals taking charge of their own careers, in reality it **needs to be a balanced partnership between individuals, their line managers, the organisation and HR.** This report examines the responsibilities of the different stakeholders and the dynamics between them. Organisations need to be mindful of their obligations as a responsible employer. It's not good enough to say 'people are responsible for their own careers' and then leave them to it. It's also not smart business sense. Being able to attract and retain the best talent can be a source of competitive advantage, and the careers infrastructure required to be an employer of choice has to be developed and maintained.

- **Careers and talent management should be viewed as two sides of the same coin.** Career development is the bottom-up process that enables individuals to build their skills and progress. Talent management processes are the mechanism by which the organisation translates business strategy into critical skills and capabilities, and actively manages the development of those capabilities. Career development and talent management should be interconnected, but often aren't well enough integrated in practice.

RESEARCH METHOD

This report is based on the following data sources:

- Interviews with 30 practitioners, experts and academics.

- A webinar on Wednesday 5 August, with 20 talent professionals from large organisations, where we discussed trends and issues around careers and talent management.

- An online CRF survey, completed by 144 respondents in September 2020. Respondents were predominantly Heads of Talent Management, Career or Leadership Development, Talent specialists and senior HR generalists. They represented a broad spread of industry sectors. A third worked for organisations with 10,000 employees or more. Two thirds were based in the UK, a quarter in Europe, and the remainder in the rest of the world.

- A review of relevant academic and practitioner literature. See References for more information.

02

CURRENT PRACTICES AND KEY ISSUES IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

In this chapter, we examine how organisations view career development today, the practices they are adopting, and how they are organised to deliver against their ambitions. We also explore the common barriers to successful career development in organisations, and how these might be overcome.

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KEY TRENDS AND ISSUES

We identified the following key trends and issues.

1. **CAREER DEVELOPMENT IS MOVING UP THE HR AGENDA BUT NEEDS TO BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE AT SUPPORTING THE FUTURE SKILLS NEEDS OF THE ORGANISATION.**

Both our survey and interviews suggest that career development is becoming more important on organisations' people agenda. Three fifths (60%) of survey respondents said their organisation is becoming more active in supporting career development for everyone, and 36% said their organisation was becoming more active in supporting career development for selected groups. Only 4% said that their organisation was becoming less active. (See Figure 1).

However, when asked to rate the effectiveness of their career development activities, responses show there is clearly room for improvement. Just over a quarter (28%) of survey respondents consider their organisation's career activities to be fairly or highly effective at supporting future resourcing and skills needs. When it comes to supporting the needs of staff in progressing their careers and developing their potential, respondents felt they were somewhat more effective, with 36% considering their approach to be highly or fairly effective. (See Figures 2 and 3). These results suggest, however, that if HR is serious about helping the business and employees prepare for the future, there is work to be done.

FIGURE 1

Which of the following best describes the direction of travel for career development in your organisation?
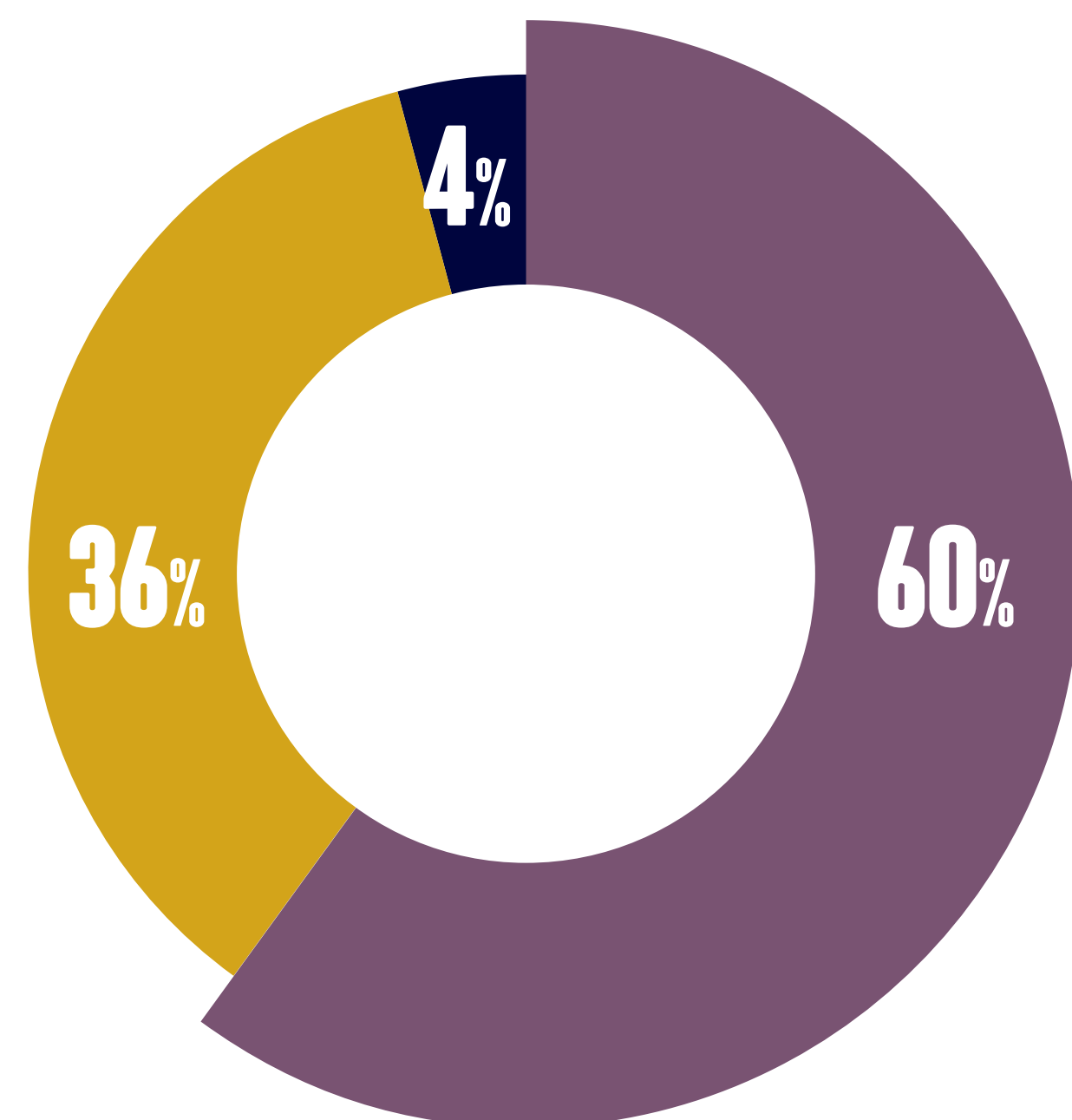
The organisation is becoming...

- ...**more active** in supporting career development **for everyone**
- ...**more active** in supporting career development **but only for selected groups**
- ...**less active** in supporting career development

FIGURES 2 AND 3

How effectively do your career development activities align with and support the future resourcing and skills needs of your organisation?

Highly and fairly ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Somewhat effective	Fairly and highly effective	Don't know
18%	16%	36%	28%	2%
16%	14%	33%	36%	1%

How effectively do your career development activities align with and support the needs of staff progressing their careers and developing their potential?

FIGURE 4

What are the main objectives of the career development activities in your organisation?
Select up to three.

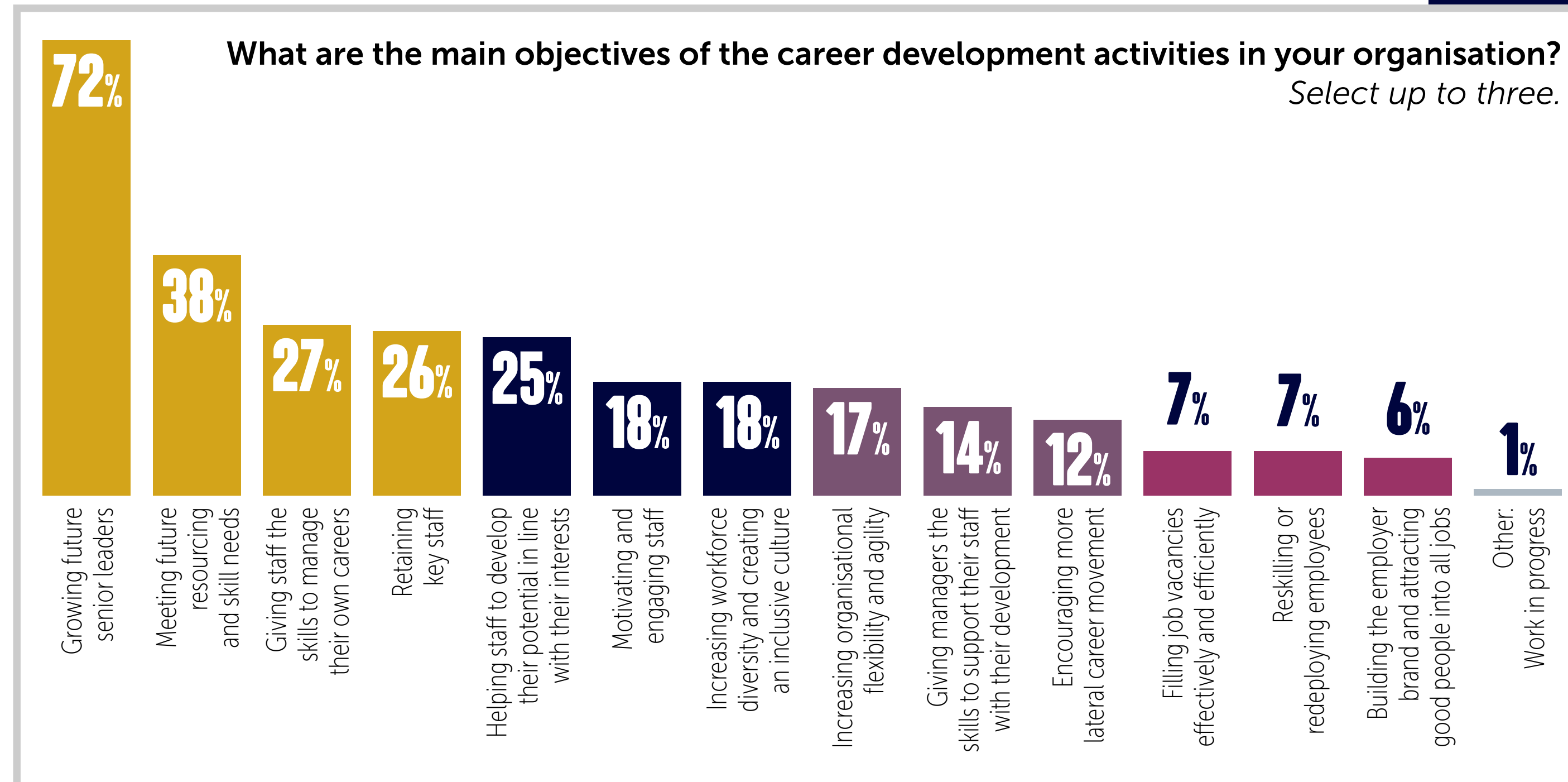| %	Objective
72%	Growing future senior leaders
38%	Meeting future resourcing and skill needs
27%	Giving staff the skills to manage their own careers
26%	Retaining key staff
25%	Helping staff to develop their potential in line with their interests
18%	Motivating and engaging staff
18%	Increasing workforce diversity and creating an inclusive culture
17%	Increasing organisational flexibility and agility
14%	Giving managers the skills to support their staff with their development
12%	Encouraging more lateral career movement
7%	Filling job vacancies effectively and efficiently
7%	Reskilling or redeploying employees
6%	Building the employer brand and attracting good people into all jobs
1%	Other: Work in progress

FIGURE 5

Do you have career development strategies for specific parts of the workforce, either instead of, or in addition to an overall strategy? If so which part(s) of the workforce?
Select all that apply.

| %	Workforce part
61%	Current or potential senior leaders or 'high potential' staff
46%	Early career entrants and trainees
28%	Wider management population
28%	Senior specialist functional or technical staff
21%	None for specific parts of the workforce
20%	Wider groups of professionals
19%	Under-represented or disadvantaged groups
6%	Other

2. DEVELOPING CURRENT AND FUTURE LEADERS REMAINS THE TOP PRIORITY.

Almost three quarters (72%) of survey respondents listed growing future senior leaders as a top-three objective for their career development activities. (See Figure 4). Interestingly, Wendy Hirsh, who is a researcher specialising in careers and employment, conducted a similar survey for the CIPD in 2003. She found that growing future senior leaders was an important driver then, but the imperative to grow future leaders has perhaps become even more pressing now. Our survey shows that many organisations are adopting careers strategies focused on specific populations in order to deliver against this objective: 61% of survey respondents have specific career development strategies for current or potential senior leaders or 'high potential' staff. Nearly half (46%) have specific career strategies for early career entrants and trainees.

3. DEVELOPING FUTURE-READY SKILLS IS SEEN AS IMPORTANT, BUT ISN'T NECESSARILY TRANSLATING INTO ACTION.
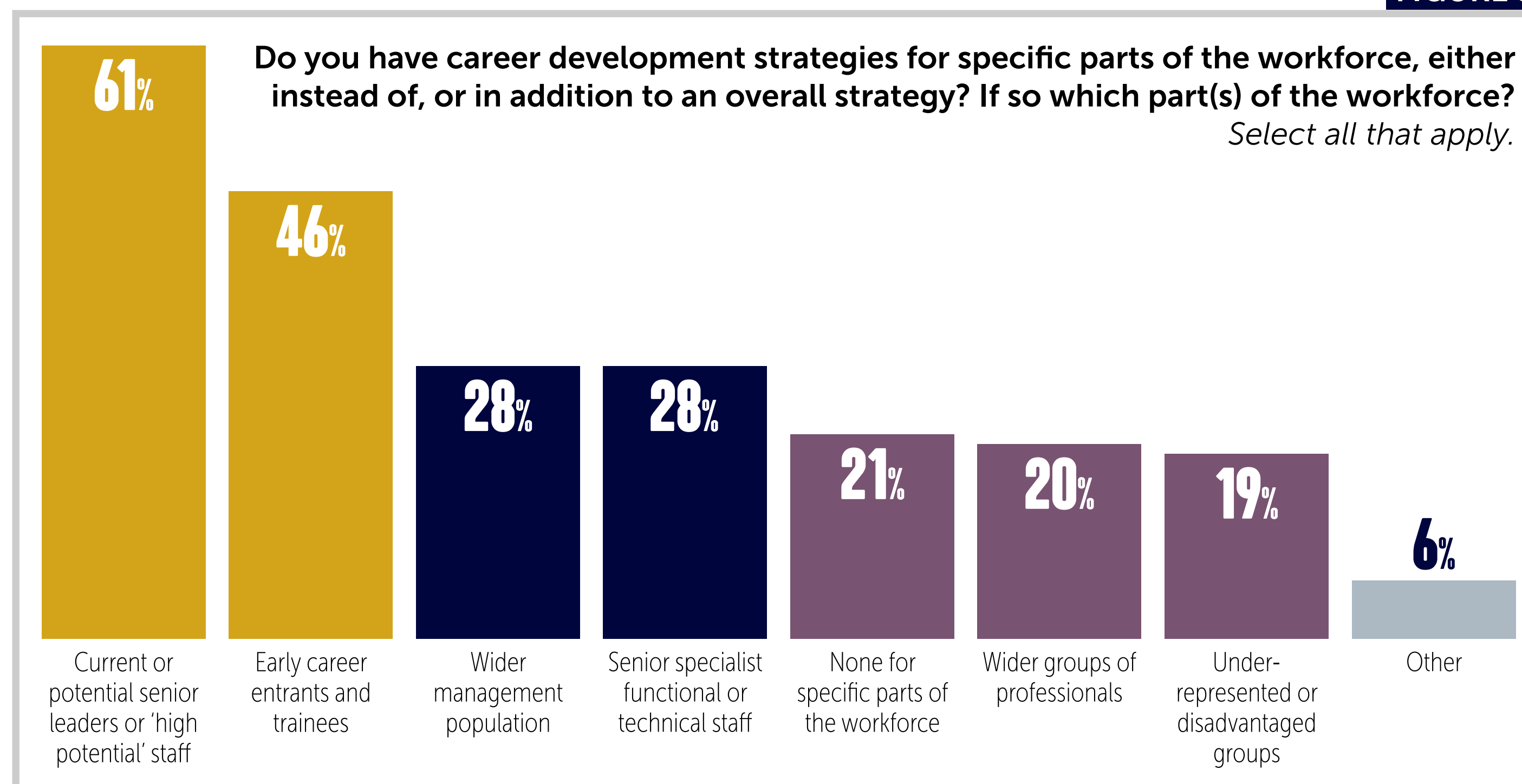
The second highest scoring priority, cited by 38% of participants, is meeting the organisation's future resourcing and skill needs. However, this is also seen as a significant barrier to success: 82% of respondents to our survey agree or strongly agree that career development activities are not sufficiently focused on future skills. This is not surprising, given the low score for effectiveness discussed above. One reason for this may be that companies need to do a better job of articulating the business strategy and direction of travel, and setting out the core capabilities they're looking to build. "It's one of the conditions for success," said Jill Foley, Managing Partner at On3 Partners. "It is the essential insight that enables individuals to manage their own development. If we want career development to be a partnership between individuals and the organisation, it is incumbent on leaders to provide context and clarity about how the business is evolving and the skills that will be most important in the future."

However, while supporting leaders' development remains the top priority, providing targeted career development for critical specialists remains the 'poor cousin'. Only 28% of survey respondents have career development strategies for senior specialist functional or technical staff, instead of or in addition to their overall career strategy. One fifth (20%) have specific strategies for wider groups of professionals. (See Figure 5).

FIGURE 6

Which of the following best reflects how your organisation sees the responsibility for career development?

Career development is...

50% ...**a partnership** between the employee and the organisation

25% ...**primarily** the responsibility of **individual employees**

25% ... **a partnership** which is **more actively driven by the organisation** for selected employees

0% ...**primarily** the responsibility of the **organisation**

Given the need for upskilling and reskilling discussed above, this could be a missed opportunity for many organisations. While focusing on future leaders is essential, HR must make sure their businesses also prioritise the critical technical and commercial skills needed to execute new strategies. "It's surprising and disappointing that companies are not connecting their skill agenda with the need to pay more career attention to highly skilled people outside of leadership positions," said Wendy Hirsh. "In my experience, the most sophisticated companies are really focused on thinking about their core technical people as well as leaders. The irony is that's where we always experience skills shortages, so if you take the skills argument seriously, you would expect more organisations to be thinking about highly skilled groups, particularly in areas such as digital and data science that are seen as essential for the future." Later, we discuss how some organisations are developing career tracks for technical specialists.

4. **FOR ALL THE TALK ABOUT INDIVIDUALS OWNING THEIR OWN CAREERS, HR SEES CAREER DEVELOPMENT AS A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND EMPLOYER.**

When we ask employers about their philosophy for career development, the most common response tends to be 'individuals are responsible for their own career'. However, probing deeper, we find that HR understands that it is unrealistic to expect employees to manage on their own development without support and guidance. Our survey shows that only a quarter of respondents said career development was primarily the responsibility of the individual employee, half (50%) saw it as a partnership between employee and employer, and the other quarter said it was a partnership that's more actively driven by the organisation for selected employees. (See Figure 6). This is reflected in HR's priorities for career development: giving staff the information, resources and skills to manage their own career is a top-three objective for 27% of respondents and helping staff progress and develop in line with their interests is a top-three priority for 25% of our sample. (See Figure 4).

The idea of partnership isn't new as an aspiration. Hirsh's 2003 research found that 80% agreed that a partnership approach was essential, even though careers are individually owned. The practical questions then become: what do we mean by 'partnership'? And do the resources and support provided by employers meet the needs of their workforce? As we discuss further below, this seems to be where organisations often fall down. We are overly reliant on line managers who often aren't skilled or motivated to develop the careers of their people, and we fail to invest in equipping employees to manage their own careers.

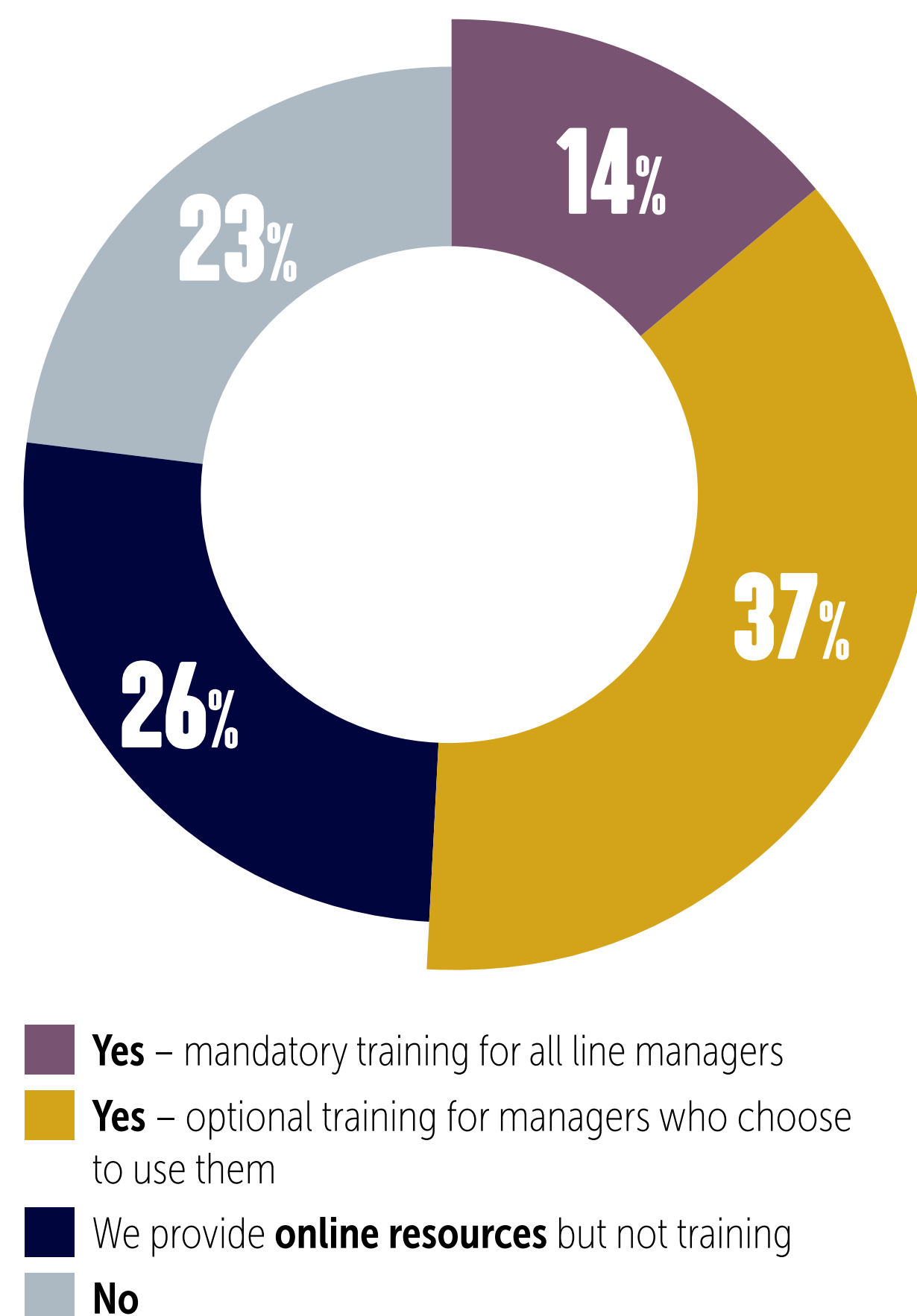Let's examine each of the players in the partnership – line managers, individuals and HR – in turn.

"
"Ten years ago, the message was that the employee owns their career. Last year we changed that message: the employee owns their career and the organisation actively enables, guides and supports long-term development in the interests of both the company and the individual."

Respondent to CRF member survey

FIGURE 7

Do you provide formal training for line managers to develop career support skills, for example through teaching how to conduct career conversations?

- **Yes** – mandatory training for all line managers
- **Yes** – optional training for managers who choose to use them
- We provide **online resources** but not training
- **No**

> "Who leads career conversations is an important consideration. They have to be skilled, and follow a consistent process. It's an advanced skill that line managers don't generally have."

Chris Humphreys, CEO, Advanced People Strategies

5. RELYING ON LINE MANAGERS TO DEVELOP CAREERS – THE GAP BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND REALITY.

Organisations tend to expect a lot of their line managers when it comes to career development. They need to be skilled in having career conversations, capable of directing their staff to opportunities in the organisation where they can develop, and motivated to give up their top performers when they want to move. Yet line managers are seen as the biggest barrier to successful career development. Our survey shows that 87% of respondents find line managers' lack of skills in having developmental conversations or supporting the career development of their teams to be a significant barrier. It's therefore concerning that only 14% said that giving managers the skills and understanding to support staff with their career development was a key objective of their approach to career development. Similarly, only 14% provide mandatory training for line managers to help them effectively support their employees' careers, and a further third (37%) provide optional training. A quarter (26%) provide online resources, but just under a quarter (23%) provide no training at all. (See Figure 7).

Also, 60% of respondents report that managers' hoarding talent is a barrier to success. "Companies' main strategy for career development seems to be that they expect managers to do all of this, and yet they don't provide support, and they don't assess how well managers do it," said Wendy Hirsh. "If you're really serious about this, just putting up some online resources for people to access through self-service is not going to cut it."

There are a number of reasons the model of the individual owning their career, supported by the line manager, may not work.

- Unless there's a strong culture of development with an expectation that managers move talent around and reciprocity of sharing talent, managers may be reluctant to give up their best performers to support their development.
- The individual's immediate line manager usually doesn't know enough about opportunities in the organisation to give good career advice.
- Individuals can find themselves in a difficult situation: if they don't like their manager, they don't trust them to do the right thing, and if they do like them they might feel disloyal if they express a desire to move.

> "What we often do in HR is we start with 'what framework or process do we need to have in place', rather than thinking of how we equip individuals with the skills they need to manage it for themselves."

Tim Haynes, Head of Talent, Leadership & OD, GW Pharmaceuticals

WHAT ALTERNATIVES DO WE HAVE TO RELYING ON LINE MANAGERS FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT?

As we discuss opposite, line managers are often the weak link for career development. Sometimes the line manager is the last person who should be managing an individual's career. Here are some alternative approaches we encountered in our research:

- **Manager-Once-Removed (MOR).** Mining company Anglo American tasks leaders two levels above the individual with supporting their career development. The MOR is responsible for assessing the potential of employees two levels below them in the hierarchy, and conducting regular career conversations. Employees can request a career conversation with their MOR at any time. By having a smaller number of leaders who are responsible for career development, it's possible to focus effort on making sure those people are equipped to have high quality career conversations, understand where the opportunities lie in the organisation and can advise individuals appropriately.

- **Decoupling performance and development.** Professional services firms – where employees tend to work on projects and change roles and teams frequently – have careers counsellors or advisers who support individuals' career development over the longer term and recommend them for promotions. The counsellor gathers feedback and performance ratings across all the work completed over the performance cycle. As work becomes increasingly project-based or delivered by agile teams (see next chapter), this model may become more widespread.

- **Career development workshops.** Individuals often don't have the skills to manage their own careers. Giving access to good career support and advice at critical career stages can be highly beneficial for the individual, and cost-effective for the organisation. Wendy Hirsh said: "We know that people find the collective and shared attempt to work on their career issues in a supportive group setting is actually quite effective, and is surprisingly good value for money."

- **Professional or volunteer career coaches.** Employing professional career coaches seems to have gone out of fashion. However, some organisations train up volunteers to provide career advice. One survey respondent has introduced 'Four-Year Talks' – the opportunity to have a career discussion with a career guidance professional after four years in the same role. Remote coaching platforms such as LHH's Ezra platform can also be used to provide professional career coaching on a scaleable basis.

- **Mentoring.** Mentors can help individuals navigate the organisation and advise on career strategies.

- **Communities of Practice** can take the lead on professional or career development for specific job families. For example at Phoenix Group, a Community of Practice connects actuaries working in different parts of the business, drives continuing professional development and manages moves across the organisation. "It's been a success story in terms of moving people across organisational silos," said Chris Rogers, Consultant, Talent & Organisation Development.

- **Peer networks.** Some organisations encourage peers going through leadership development programmes as a cohort together to continue to support each other's careers once the programme is completed.

If we really are expecting line managers to be the 'superheroes' of career development, we need to attend to four things:

1. Selecting managers who are motivated and skilled in career development and role model the right behaviours

2. Providing adequate training and resources

3. Making sure they understand the organisation's strategy and what that means in terms of skills and capabilities that need to be developed, as well as the opportunities available in the organisation to develop them

4. Evaluating how well they are performing and rewarding them appropriately, for example by comparing internal moves data and employee engagement scores across different parts of the business.

Perhaps it's time to recognise that we may be expecting too much of busy managers on top of their responsibilities in running the business, and to find other ways of providing career support? See the box for some alternatives.

> "
> "You might be fortunate enough to have a versatile and skilled line manager with a genuine interest in helping people develop, but that is unusual. It's more likely the organisation will need to do other things in addition to providing appropriate career support, such as training mentors, employing career coaches, facilitating peer coaching or running career development workshops."
>
> David North, Leadership and Career Development Consultant

3%

of respondents **offer mid-career reviews**

> " "You can only succeed with a philosophy of colleagues owning their own careers if you have the right tools, communications and leadership to be able to fulfil that promise. People will say: I own my own career, great, but how do I do it?"

Vishal Thanki, Group Talent Director, Kingfisher

6. INDIVIDUALS NEED INFORMATION, SKILLS AND SUPPORT IF THEY ARE TO MANAGE THEIR OWN CAREERS EFFECTIVELY.

For most people, managing their career is not a skill that comes naturally. Careers professionals would say that, regardless of the careers infrastructure that's provided by the employer, most people would benefit from developing the generic skills necessary to manage their career. If we really are expecting people to continue working into old age, potentially changing careers several times along the way, this will be all the more necessary. However, few organisations provide career reviews at specific life stages, such as mid-career reviews (3% of our sample). It takes effort to skill up individuals: "We have worked hard over multiple years at skilling individuals up to have meaningful career conversations," said Kate Richardson-Moore, Global Head of Talent, Diversity and Engagement at Linklaters. "We've provided tools and techniques so they can talk meaningfully about how they might like to develop their career, what's missing, what support might be needed, how to track progress. We have also invested significantly in the skills of our leaders to support those conversations."

Individuals also need information about the skills the organisation needs to develop to execute its strategy, the types of careers employees can expect to have, and what options are available to accumulate the job and learning experiences required to develop those skills.

So, what do companies do in practice? We asked survey respondents which resources and activities they provide to support (1) all employees and (2) select groups such as leaders, high potentials, professionals and trainees. We found that provision differs considerably depending on the population in question.

- Career development for all employees is relatively low-touch, relying on the functioning of the internal job market, formal and informal career conversations with line managers, online career planning tools, and internal networks. (See Figure 8).

- For current and high potential future leaders, support is much more intense and personalised, with access to professional career support and development programmes as well as career moves being actively managed and discussed in talent review forums. (See Figure 9).

- Support for professional staff focuses on skills and competency frameworks, career pathways and external secondments. (See Figure 10).

- Early career entrants and trainees are supported through organisationally facilitated work experiences and development programmes. (See Figure 11).

Organisations that used to employ armies of professional career coaches now report that cost pressures have made this unsustainable. However, some organisations are pursuing more cost-effective alternatives, such as running career workshops, training volunteer career coaches or training HR business partners as professional career coaches.

FIGURE 8

Which of the following career development resources and activities does your organisation provide for ALL EMPLOYEES?

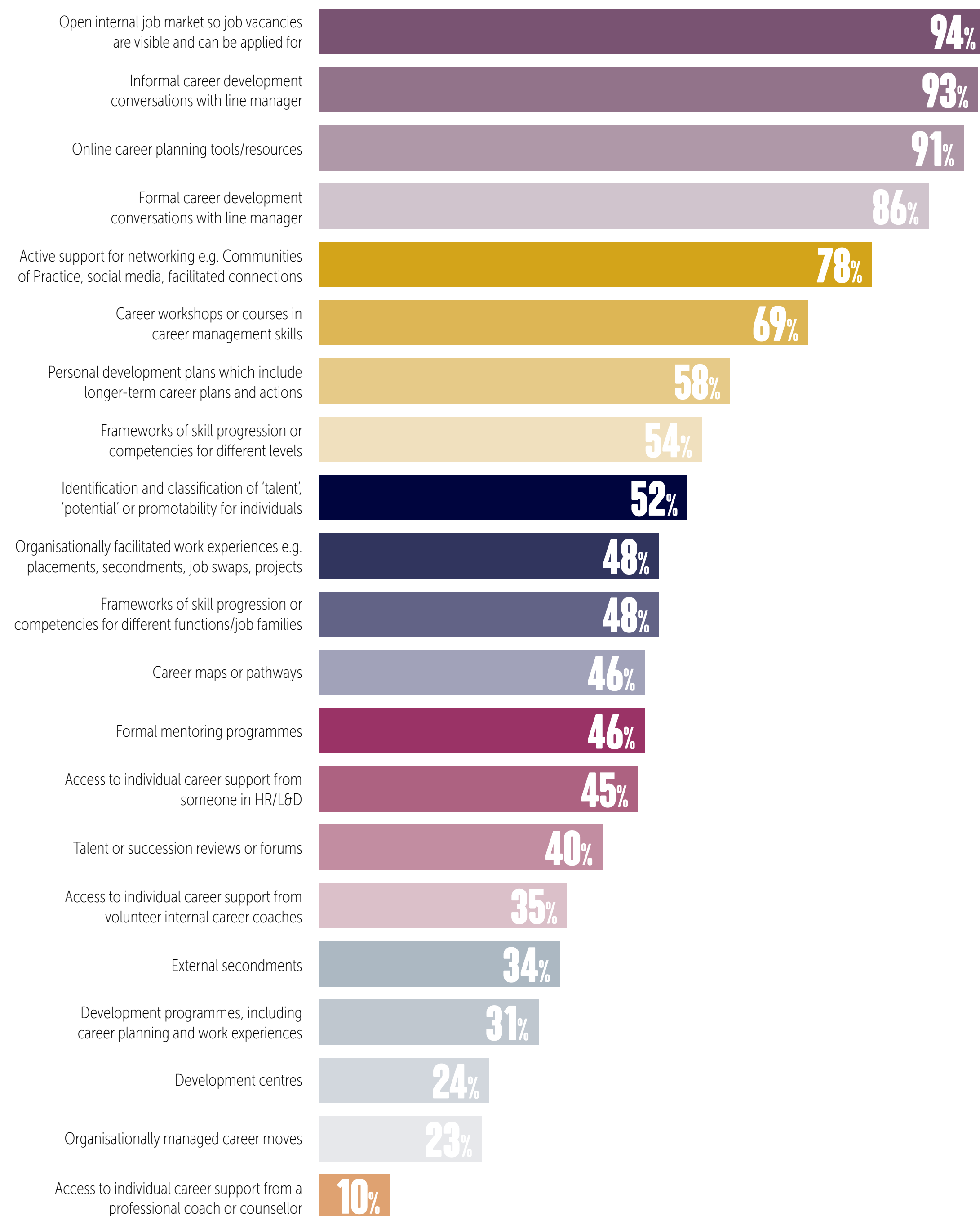| Resource/Activity	%
Open internal job market so job vacancies are visible and can be applied for	94%
Informal career development conversations with line manager	93%
Online career planning tools/resources	91%
Formal career development conversations with line manager	86%
Active support for networking e.g. Communities of Practice, social media, facilitated connections	78%
Career workshops or courses in career management skills	69%
Personal development plans which include longer-term career plans and actions	58%
Frameworks of skill progression or competencies for different levels	54%
Identification and classification of 'talent', 'potential' or promotability for individuals	52%
Organisationally facilitated work experiences e.g. placements, secondments, job swaps, projects	48%
Frameworks of skill progression or competencies for different functions/job families	48%
Career maps or pathways	46%
Formal mentoring programmes	46%
Access to individual career support from someone in HR/L&D	45%
Talent or succession reviews or forums	40%
Access to individual career support from volunteer internal career coaches	35%
External secondments	34%
Development programmes, including career planning and work experiences	31%
Development centres	24%
Organisationally managed career moves	23%
Access to individual career support from a professional coach or counsellor	10%

FIGURE 9

Which of the following career development resources and activities does your organisation provide for LEADERS OR HIGH POTENTIAL FUTURE LEADERS?
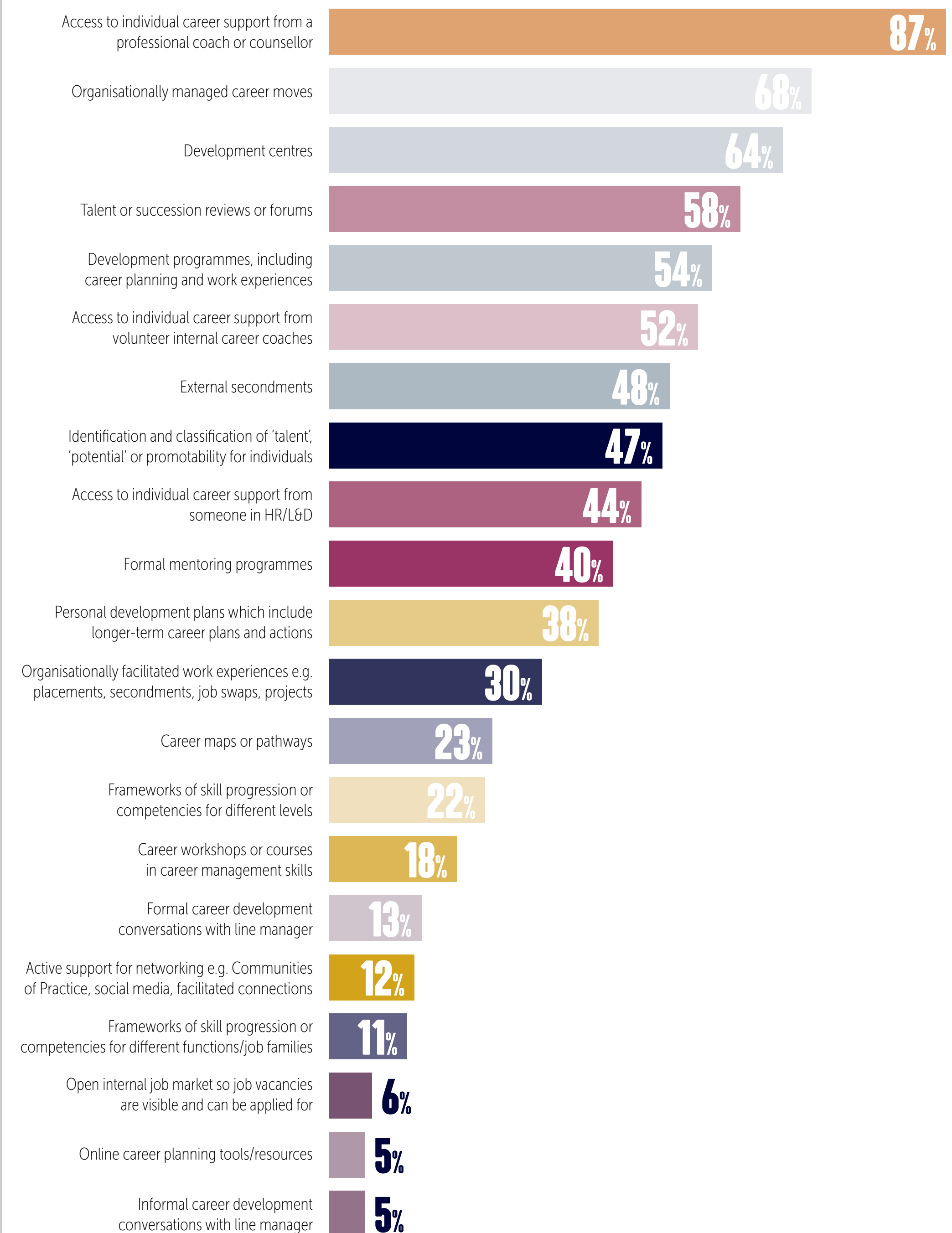
Resource/Activity	%
Access to individual career support from a professional coach or counsellor	87%
Organisationally managed career moves	68%
Development centres	64%
Talent or succession reviews or forums	58%
Development programmes, including career planning and work experiences	54%
Access to individual career support from volunteer internal career coaches	52%
External secondments	48%
Identification and classification of 'talent', 'potential' or promotability for individuals	47%
Access to individual career support from someone in HR/L&D	44%
Formal mentoring programmes	40%
Personal development plans which include longer-term career plans and actions	38%
Organisationally facilitated work experiences e.g. placements, secondments, job swaps, projects	30%
Career maps or pathways	23%
Frameworks of skill progression or competencies for different levels	22%
Career workshops or courses in career management skills	18%
Formal career development conversations with line manager	13%
Active support for networking e.g. Communities of Practice, social media, facilitated connections	12%
Frameworks of skill progression or competencies for different functions/job families	11%
Open internal job market so job vacancies are visible and can be applied for	6%
Online career planning tools/resources	5%
Informal career development conversations with line manager	5%

FIGURE 10

Which of the following career development resources and activities does your organisation provide for PROFESSIONAL STAFF?

Resource/Activity	%
Frameworks of skill progression or competencies for different functions/job families	46%
Frameworks of skill progression or competencies for different levels	35%
Career maps or pathways	29%
External secondments	21%
Development programmes, including career planning and work experiences	20%
Identification and classification of 'talent', 'potential' or promotability for individuals	17%
Organisationally facilitated work experiences e.g. placements, secondments, job swaps, project	17%
Access to individual career support from volunteer internal career coaches	16%
Development centres	16%
Talent or succession reviews or forums	16%
Access to individual career support from someone in HR/L&D	14%
Formal mentoring programmes	13%
Organisationally managed career moves	13%
Career workshops or courses in career management skills	12%
Active support for networking e.g. Communities of Practice, social media, facilitated connections	12%
Personal development plans which include longer-term career plans and actions	9%
Formal career development conversations with line manager	9%
Access to individual career support from a professional coach or counsellor	8%
Online career planning tools/resources	5%
Informal career development conversations with line manager	5%
Open internal job market so job vacancies are visible and can be applied for	2%

FIGURE 11

Which of the following career development resources and activities does your organisation provide for EARLY CAREER ENTRANTS OR TRAINEES?

Resource/Activity	%
Organisationally facilitated work experiences e.g. placements, secondments, job swaps, projects	33%
Development programmes, including career planning and work experiences	30%
Development centres	28%
Career maps or pathways	27%
Access to individual career support from someone in HR/L&D	23%
Formal mentoring programmes	22%
Organisationally managed career moves	18%
Access to individual career support from volunteer internal career coaches	13%
Frameworks of skill progression or competencies for different functions/job families	13%
Career workshops or courses in career management skills	12%
Talent or succession reviews or forums	10%
Access to individual career support from a professional coach or counsellor	10%
Frameworks of skill progression or competencies for different levels	9%
Identification and classification of 'talent', 'potential' or promotability for individuals	7%
External secondments	7%
Active support for networking e.g. Communities of Practice, social media, facilitated connections	5%
Personal development plans which include longer-term career plans and actions	4%
Formal career development conversations with line manager	3%
Informal career development conversations with line manager	2%
Online career planning tools/resources	2%
Open internal job market so job vacancies are visible and can be applied for	0%

FIGURE 12

Does anyone in HR at senior professional level or above, have clear responsibility for career development policy and activities?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

10%
23%
67%
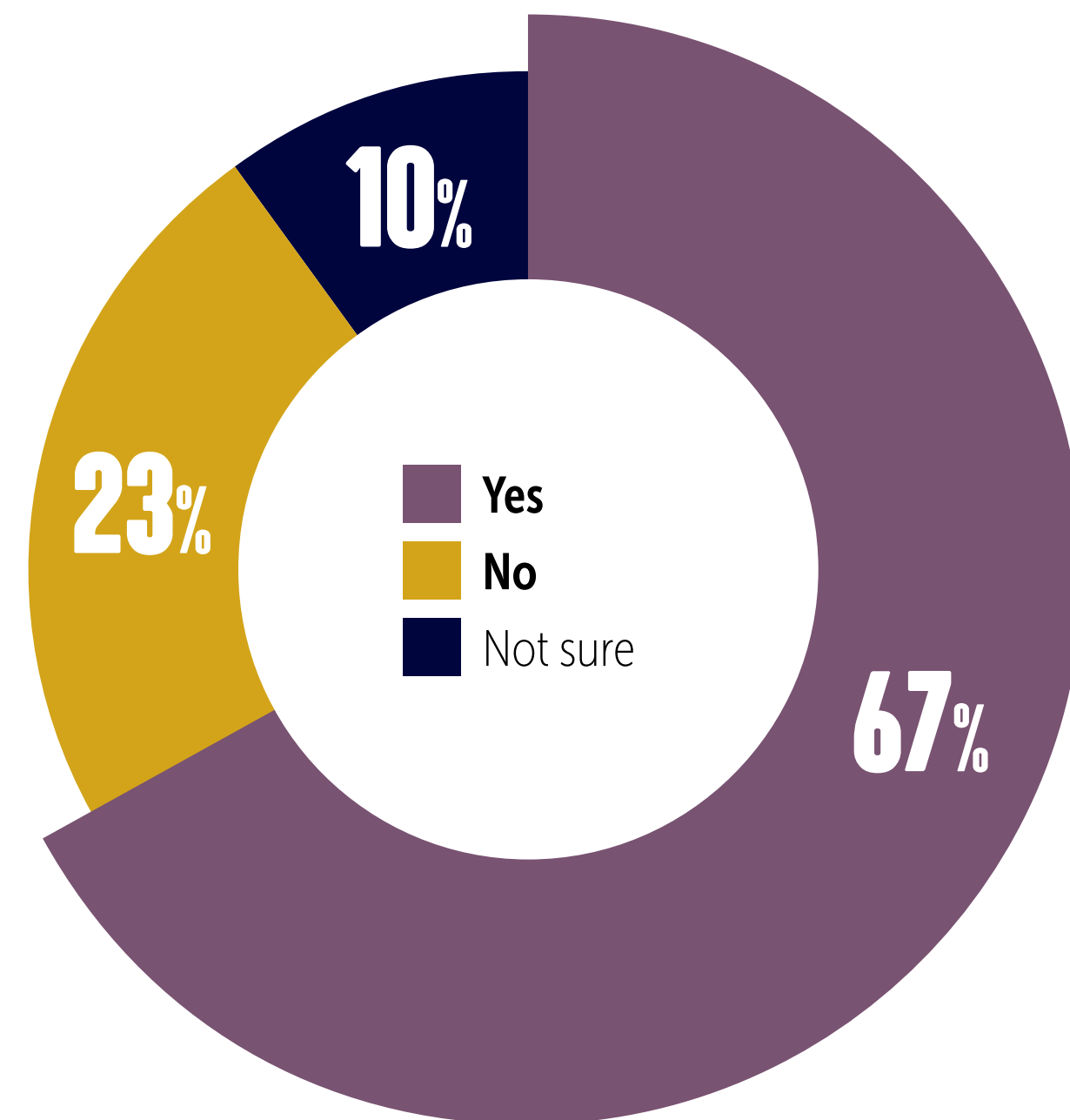
7. LACK OF CLARITY AROUND HR'S ROLE IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT.

Given that career development appears to be rising up the HR agenda, we were surprised to find that in only two thirds of organisations is there someone within the HR senior team who has clear responsibility for career development policy and activities. (See Figure 12). There is also no clear consensus where in HR responsibility sits. Should careers be more closely aligned with L&D, i.e. focused on development, or with resourcing or talent, so it's more about deploying people so they acquire the right developmental experiences? Our survey found organisations are evenly split on these questions: 41% report that responsibility sits with L&D; 40% have career development sitting under talent management.

Another option is to appoint a direct report to the CHRO who's dedicated to coordinating all aspects of careers (only 4% of respondents take this approach), or to integrate accountability for talent and careers at a senior level in HR. These results prompt the question of whether an organisation can truly say it takes careers and reskilling seriously if there is no one at senior level in HR who has responsibility for career development as the major part of their role. It would be akin to saying that pay and incentives are important, but we don't have a senior person who's accountable for Reward.

"

"For most organisations and HR functions, career development is the malnourished corner of talent management."

Wendy Hirsh, Employment Researcher and Consultant

SUCCESSION PLANNING TODAY

Our survey found most organisations (61%) do succession planning for all roles above a certain level in the hierarchy, 45% plan succession for selected business-critical leadership roles and 35% plan for roles which are seen as strategically critical for future business success. Much less common (16% of respondents) is to plan for selected technical or functional roles.

FIGURE 13

For which roles do you have succession plans? *Select all that apply.*

Role	Percentage
All roles above a certain level in the hierarchy	61%
Selected business-critical leadership roles	45%
Roles seen as strategically critical for future business success	35%
Selected technical or functional roles	16%
Roles for which a regulator requires to have succession plans	16%
Don't do succession planning	10%
Other	2%
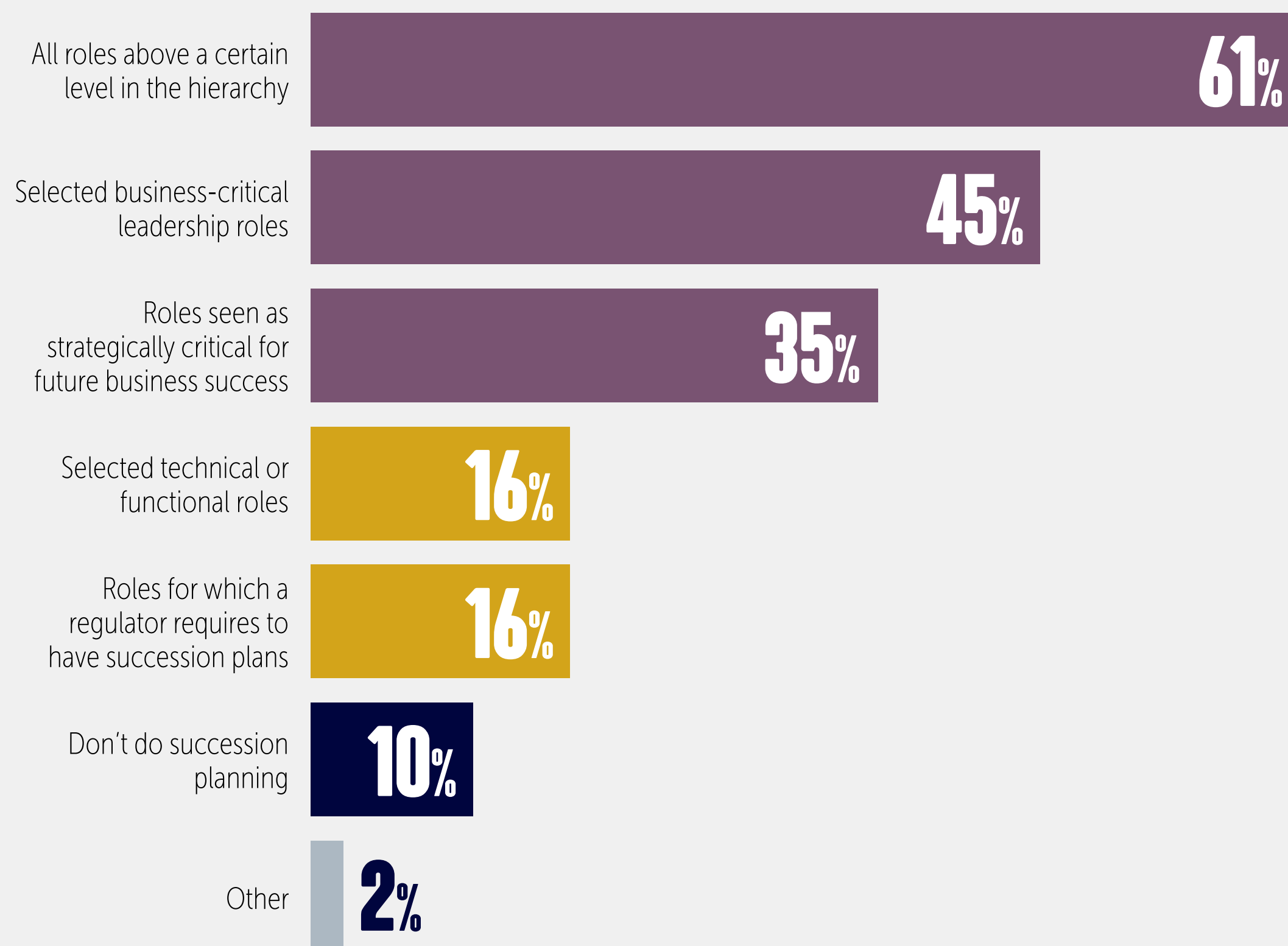
> "Careers, development and succession need to be linked together, but we often find they sit in separate buckets. The elements don't work well together, and the outcome is sub-optimal."

Natalie Jacquemin, Partner, HR and Workforce Transformation, Mercer

8. CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES SHOULD INTEGRATE WITH TALENT AND SUCCESSION, BUT OFTEN DON'T.

Succession planning and other talent processes such as talent reviews and talent pools are important elements of career development. Done well, it's a method of managing careers for some groups of people, whether they are critical talent, senior specialists or future senior leaders. "Succession planning remains essential as a means of developing careers," said Wendy Hirsh. "Some career trajectories require you to take on a role you haven't done before, which means you have to be able to orchestrate moves."

If we think of succession planning as a top-down process and career development as bottom-up, they should join up. However, the reality is that they often don't fit together. This is reflected in our survey: only 19% of respondents said their approach to succession planning is fairly or highly effective in developing future strategic capabilities required by the business, and only 22% considered their organisation's succession planning efforts to be fairly or highly effective in preparing potential successors for new roles. This suggests succession plans are not being used as well as they could be to drive the development of critical talent.

How could succession planning practices be improved? Here are some suggestions from our research:

- Identify the capabilities you need to nurture in order to execute the strategy (e.g. digital skills) and build talent pools. For example, Tesco plans succession at job family level rather than role by role. Make sure those who are in talent pools receive differential career support and development. "Developing pools of capability, as the name suggests, should mean that leaders have a broader pool of candidates to consider when roles become vacant. Allowing more choice and flexibility in the way organisations match talent to value," said Jill Foley. Our survey suggests that talent pools are under-utilised in organisations today: only 33% of organisations consider both individual roles and talent pools in their succession planning, and 9% focus on talent pools only. The majority (58%) focus on individual roles only.

> "As we redesign our career approaches around becoming agile to fit our future needs, we are moving away from the idea that leadership means reaching a specific level in the organisation or leading a team. We believe that progression can mean different things, such as leading a topic on behalf of the organisation or coaching others in your area of expertise. Our imperative is to live leadership from every seat."

Natalie Cetkovic, Talent Management Lead, Swiss Re

19%

say their approach to succession planning is **fairly or highly effective in developing future strategic capabilities** required by the business

- Focus on roles that are critical for the future of the business, which might include deep technical specialists as well as general managers. Some companies in highly technical fields, such as Ørsted (renewable energy) and Avanade (technology services) are developing technical career tracks so they can attract and retain the critical skills they need at senior level. "It used to be that everything was about the GM role," said Jessica Foster Head of Executive Bench, RHR International. "But it's possible that 10% of your growth next year could come from someone who has a background in developing AI, for example. Be careful not to put people in situations that don't play to their strengths. You risk losing that talent from spaces where they add unique value."

- It's essential that the right objective information is on hand when discussions take place. Gather up-to-date information on individual aspirations and make sure it's searchable. One thing that may encourage people to provide honest and up-to-date information about their plans and motivations is to let them know they are in a talent pool or on a succession plan and that any information they provide will be taken into account. However, our survey found that less than half of respondents (46%) inform people that they are on a succession plan or in a talent pool.

- Focus attention where it's most needed. "Which roles are likely to turn over in the next 18 months? Those are the ones to pay attention to," said Jessica Foster. "Too often, succession planning meetings just run through the same information as last time. Focus on the 20% where you might expect movement, not the 80% who aren't going to move in the next few years."

- Find ways of flagging and discussing undervalued talent. RHR's Executive Bench assessment suite flags people who scored highly on its assessments but are ranked lower on the company's measures. "This can tell you where you are not moving critical talent in your pipeline fast enough," said Jessica Foster, who runs Executive Bench at RHR. "Those people are probably stuck and you need to do something with them." Shell proactively looks at a combination of performance ratings, potential and progression information to identify when emerging talent and people with high potential may plateau or need extra support, and flags this so leaders can take action to unlock career moves.

- Get away from check-box approaches to career development, such as the need to have worked in multiple countries and run a P&L. "People will be past it before they can check all the boxes; it's an absurd waste of talent," said Foster. One effect of the Covid-19 pandemic is companies are less likely to require people to undertake overseas assignments, although this trend was already underway.

- Make sure conversations focus on planning development actions for people who are on succession plans. Hold leaders accountable for following through on the actions they agree to take. Reward leaders with a track record in moving talent around the organisation. As one of the respondents to our survey commented: "We need to train successors for the future, not just put them on a list."

9. OBJECTIVES AROUND DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION HAVE NOT TRANSLATED INTO DIFFERENTIAL CAREER STRATEGIES.

Although D&I is a key focus area for HR in most organisations, we find that D&I strategy and career development strategies are not as integrated as they could be. Only 19% of survey respondents have a specific careers strategy for under-represented or disadvantaged groups of people. 18% list increasing workforce diversity as one of the top three objectives for career development activities in their organisation.

When we asked about career development resources and activities provided by the organisation specifically for under-represented or disadvantaged groups of people, only mentoring came out as significant (provided by 31% of respondents). Some organisations run careers workshops for cohorts of under-represented groups such as women and ethnic minorities.

> "Career frameworks and pathways can sometimes create a narrow view of career routes when, in reality, there can be a multitude of ways to reach a certain role or level. However, despite this, people want certainty around their career development. They often don't know where to start and so there's a demand for structure and pathways."

Anna Bradley, Head of Group Talent & Executive Resourcing, Tesco

> "We want to create an environment where you can have that sense of progression without having to become a people manager."

Nicholas Creswell, Head of Global Talent, Ørsted

For example, Linklaters runs career programmes for female and minority ethnic cohorts and for colleagues from different socio-economic backgrounds. These provide mentoring, help them navigate their career in the firm, and provide coaching either in groups or individually. Formalised sponsor programmes connect people with a sponsor who advocates for them. The firm also runs sessions that lift the lid on the promotion process, where people who have made it through the process share their experiences. "If you don't have those natural connections or networks, which is often the case for minority colleagues, we need to make sure you get access to the kind of information you would otherwise never know," said Kate Richardson-Moore.

10. STRUCTURED CAREER PATHS AND LADDERS RISK CREATING A PERCEPTION OF CERTAINTY THAT DOESN'T EXIST.

A choice that talent professionals have to make is whether there is value in defining career maps, pathways or frameworks. Our survey showed that just over half (54%) of companies have frameworks that define skills progression or competencies for different levels, and just under half (46%) have career maps or pathways covering all employees. Time and again we heard the view that employees are looking for information about the route their career might take, or even a degree of certainty about what they might expect from their career, but that frameworks and paths suggest a degree of predictability that doesn't exist.

Career ladders and frameworks suffer from a number of problems:

- They're backward looking, not sufficiently focused on skills needed in the future, and go out of date quickly.
- They can suggest upward linear progression, when sometimes career progression means taking a sideways move or even moving role entirely.
- Companies can spend significant time and effort developing tools that are little used. Just over half (56%) of survey respondents agreed that lack of use is a barrier to successful career development for their organisation.

However, some career professionals suggest that providing broad outlines of the types of career people could pursue and highlighting the required skills, qualifications and personal attributes and experiences that help develop those skills, can be helpful, both to individuals and their managers. "There is value in sharing information about the broad career journeys an individual might consider across an organisation, and indicative career paths within and across job families," said David North. "The key word is *indicative*. There are no guarantees or certainties, but it helps people to start thinking about potential career directions."

Organisations appear to have had a degree of success where they have defined specialist career paths that offer an alternative to progression via general management or a significant line role. For example, Avanade has recently launched a Technical Leadership Career Path which can lead to the position of Distinguished Engineer. The company's employee survey showed that its best technologists faced a frustrating choice when their careers reached a certain level: to progress further they either had to transition to business leadership or pursue their passion outside the organisation. A working group consisting of the company's most advanced technologists and HR designed the infrastructure for the programme. This includes a selection process built upon defined expectations, and differentiated career levels to guide future talent decisions and act as a north star for early career technologists who may aspire to be on this path.

Some organisations are developing structured pathways for technical roles to redeploy people whose skills are becoming obsolete due to technological change. BT has developed structured, formal learning pathways for key transitions such as reskilling specialists in copper networks to fibre, or transitioning from frontline operations into digital marketing. These programmes, which are designed as a combination of capability development and on-the-job experiences over multiple years, help people whose jobs will be displaced by changes within the organisation.

FIGURE 14

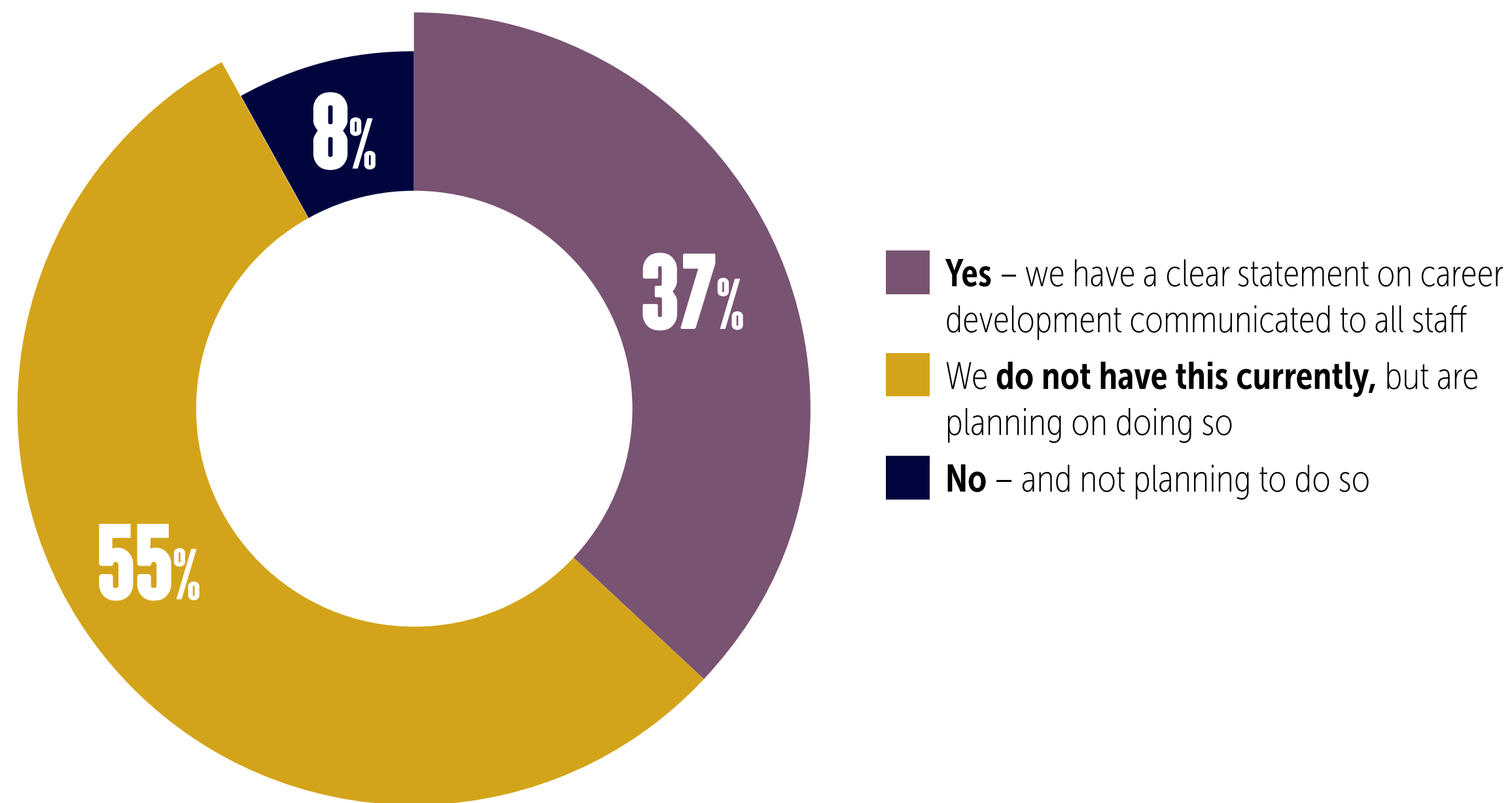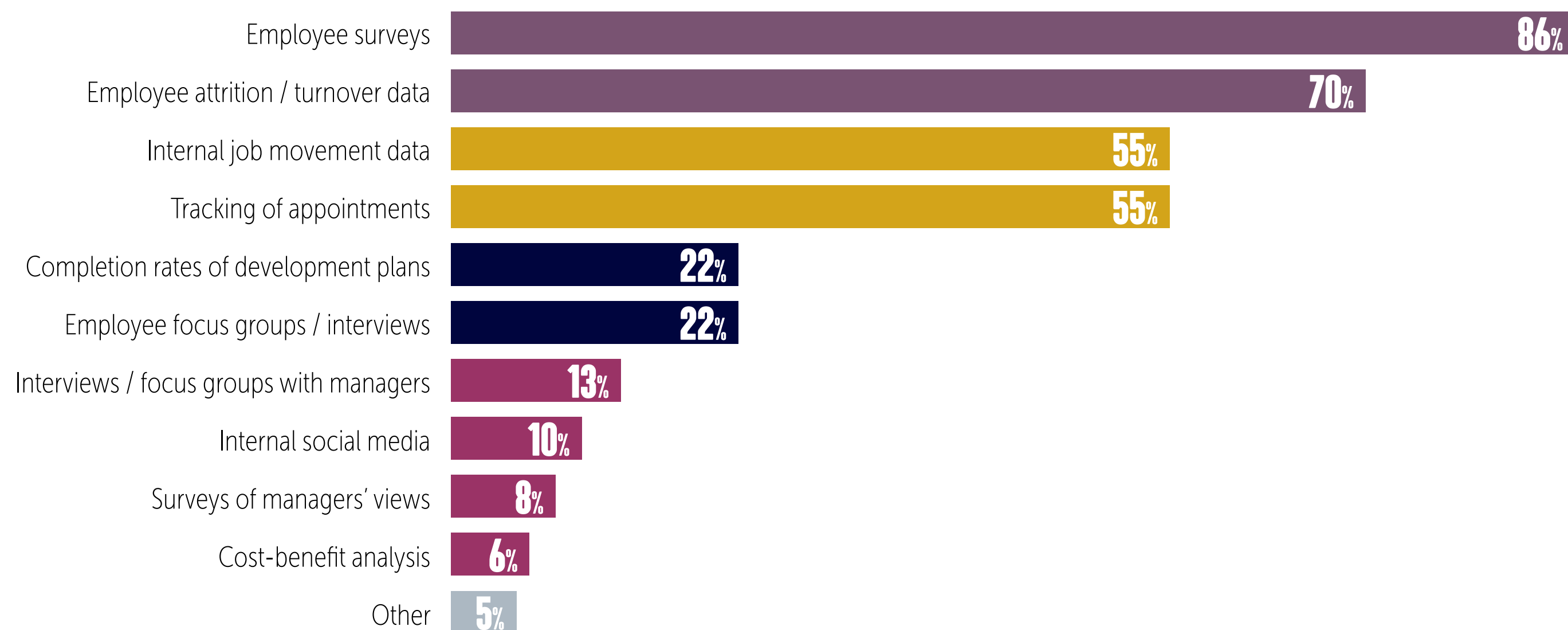**Is your approach to career development clearly communicated to all staff?**

- **Yes** – we have a clear statement on career development communicated to all staff
- We **do not have this currently,** but are planning on doing so
- **No** – and not planning to do so

FIGURE 15

Which kinds of information do you use to assess the effectiveness of career development activity? *Select all that apply.*

Employee surveys	86%
Employee attrition / turnover data	70%
Internal job movement data	55%
Tracking of appointments	55%
Completion rates of development plans	22%
Employee focus groups / interviews	22%
Interviews / focus groups with managers	13%
Internal social media	10%
Surveys of managers' views	8%
Cost-benefit analysis	6%
Other	5%

11. COMMUNICATION CAN BE HIT-AND-MISS.

Our survey found that many organisations are missing a trick by failing to adequately communicate their commitment to career development to employees. Only 37% of survey respondents have a clear statement on career development that's communicated to all staff. Fortunately, a majority (55%) are planning to address this, but this is clearly a missed opportunity, that could boost employee engagement and enhance the employer brand. There is a danger for employers that fail to communicate adequately that employees interpret 'you are responsible for your own career' as 'you're on your own'.

12. A FAILURE TO EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF ACTIONS TAKEN.

CRF research over many years has shown that HR is poor at evaluating the impact of its career development activities on business outcomes. This is borne out in our survey: only a third (33%) of respondents' organisations evaluate the effectiveness of career development activities. For those that do evaluate their performance, the principal measures are employee surveys (86%), employee attrition/turnover data (70%) and their ability to appoint internally, whether through succession planning or internal job moves (55%). Only 6% of respondents undertake any form of cost-benefit analysis. (See Figure 15).

13. GOOD INTENTIONS DO NOT ALWAYS TRANSLATE INTO SUSTAINABLE ACTIONS.

HR has a tendency to be fascinated by shiny new things, but the follow-through can be patchy. There is no shortage of good ideas in the careers and talent space, but what works in practice will depend on the context of the organisation. All infrastructure needs to be maintained: building and embedding a sustainable careers infrastructure is a multi-year undertaking requiring ongoing support, commitment, communication and evaluation. Yet our survey found that half of respondents (48%) agree that a lack of clear accountability or continuity of attention in HR is a barrier to successful career development.

WHAT WOULD HR TEAMS MOST LIKE TO IMPROVE ABOUT CAREER DEVELOPMENT?

Respondents to our survey said they would most like to improve the following:

- Better connection with business strategy and clarity on future skills to improve talent planning

- Line managers taking responsibility and building capability to lead effective development conversations

- Transparency around opportunities in the organisation, such as one-off projects or building stretch into the current role

- More structured support to under-represented groups

- Supporting specialist career paths

- Systems that support development and succession planning, enable capture and use of data around employee skills and aspirations and matching of individuals to opportunities

- Stronger executive sponsorship and support for career activities

- Greater movement across internal silos.

> "We should be talking more about development in terms of getting better at the job you are here to do: this, in turn, will help your currency, relevance and employability for future roles."
>
> Claire Thomas, Director Organisational Development and Talent, Penguin Random House

FIGURE 16

To what extent has your organisation's approach to development changed over the last three years?

- 24% — Not really changed
- 43% — Some change
- 29% — Significant change
- 4% — Don't know
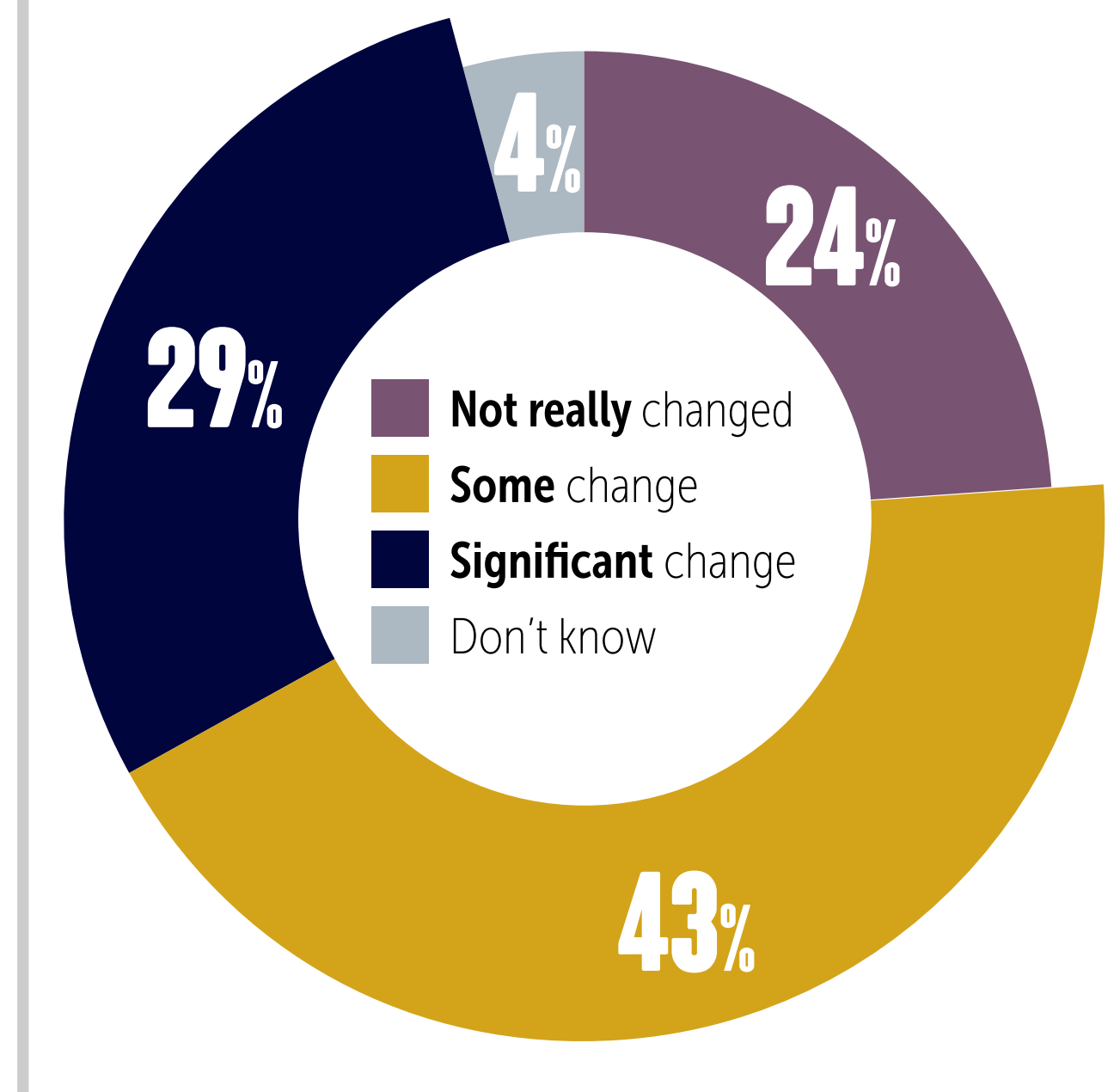
In our research we heard numerous stories of new careers strategies that had strong CEO support, but withered on the vine when a new senior leadership team took over. Ideally, initiatives are championed by the CEO and CHRO, who continue to see them through over time.

As well as moving up the agenda for HR, the practice of career development is also changing. Just under a third (29%) of respondents to our survey have seen significant change in their approach to career development over the last three years, with a further 43% having seen some change.

The following were common themes around the nature of change underway:

- Becoming an organisational (not just HR) imperative, with greater discussion at executive team level and more visible CEO sponsorship

- A desire to increase transparency around skills and the availability of opportunities

- Encouraging lateral movement across silos

- A shift from episodic to continuous appraisal and development conversations

- Greater emphasis on creating developmental experiences on the job

- Democratisation of career development by making workshops, toolkits and resources more widely available

- Introduction of new talent management systems allowing better data capture, analysis, planning and process automation.

In the next chapter we focus on two major trends which are having a notable effect on talent and career development in organisations – new technology platforms and changing working practices – and examine their impact.

CASE NOTES: COTY

Over the last three years, Sarah Burns, VP Global Talent, has led the design of Coty's career strategy. The business drivers for this change were:

- To support the company's mission to become a disruptive challenger in the beauty market. The CEO at the time recognised that building a compelling career proposition would be a way of differentiating in the market.

- Integrating the acquisition of Procter & Gamble's beauty business. Developing a common careers strategy for the combined business was a way of breaking down silos.

- External research showed changes in the market and the impact of digital in particular meant a reduction in the shelf-life of skills.

Coty's new strategy for career development was underpinned by the following principles:

- Today's careers are about growth rather than predictable linear progression based on time in role. This means a combination of lateral movement to build experiences, and stretch assignments to enable steeper rises.

- It's experiences, not competencies, that drive growth. The careers strategy had to help colleagues develop a portfolio of experiences to keep their skills relevant and fresh.

- The approach had to provide enough infrastructure to guide employees and support career conversations, without getting bogged down in too much information, or cumbersome frameworks that require constant adaptation in a changing world.

"Our messaging talks about the psychological shift that was needed: letting go of predictability and the expectation of career progression being a series of upward steps," said Burns. "We talked about remaining relevant and adopting future-proofing habits™, such as being curious, open to learning through experience, being persistent and prepared to embrace failure. We wanted people to let go of the idea that HR or their line manager would tell them the answer without making them feel they were on their own."

With the support of the Career Innovation Company, Coty articulated seven core beliefs that underpin the new careers philosophy and drive communications with colleagues on the new career deal:

1. Experiences build capabilities

2. Individuals own their career, Coty supports all careers

3. Every career is unique and personal

4. Breadth and depth of experience is of equal value

5. Progression is on merit

6. Everyone should stay in role long enough to learn and contribute

7. Growth is enriched through challenges outside of job scope.

The career beliefs were validated in internal workshops where colleagues discussed what would need to be true for the beliefs to come to life. This work helped shape a longer term systemic plan to facilitate internal mobility and to ensure careers and other people processes worked consistently together.

The new careers approach includes the following elements:

- Functional Experience maps. Coty developed maps setting out common experiences colleagues could expect to build within their function, and what would be required to move across functions. Each experience map sets out three levels on one page: Foundational experiences gained at Manager or Director level; Proving experiences gained at Director or VP level; and Executive experiences gained at SVP level.

- Role snapshots: Six to eight high priority roles per function are mapped with a 'day in the life' one page for each to help colleagues understand the role and the experiences required.

- Role matrix: map most roles in each function, including the destination roles that have a role snapshot. They help visualise the roles that bring different experiences: global and local; breadth and depth. "The idea was that we would highlight what experiences you might need to get under your belt to be able to move within or across functions, and what specific roles might bring in terms of experience," said Burns.

- A new careers portal with diagnostic tools, videos and curated resources designed to help people understand the changing career landscape at Coty, reflect, and come up with a career action plan.

- Webinar-based training for line managers around how to have conversations with their teams around long-term growth.

- Webinar-based training for individuals providing a practical toolkit of self-coaching activities. "The idea is, before people start thinking about a specific job title they might be aiming for, to think about questions such as 'Who am I?', 'What's my brand?', 'How good is my network and how can I leverage it?'", said Burns.

- Storytelling around experiences. Focus groups identified six pivotal experiences that were common, regardless of position in the organisation: broadening experiences, personal resilience and agility, leadership, understanding myself, transformation through challenging and deepening experiences. Coty developed animations depicting anonymised career journeys to highlight the variety and uniqueness of journeys people have crafted for themselves.

Key learnings

- CEO sponsorship makes a huge difference in terms of what can be achieved. Having the support of a CEO who recognised the value in quality career support and was prepared to invest in careers infrastructure was key.

- You have to be careful about the messaging around individuals driving their career so colleagues don't perceive it as an abdication of responsibility by the company. Be clear about the respective roles of the individual, line manager and the company.

03

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY AND EVOLVING WORKING PRACTICES ON TALENT AND CAREERS

In this chapter we discuss two trends in the evolution of talent and careers: the impact of emerging technology in the talent space, and how the wider adoption of working practices such as Agile are affecting approaches to career management.

3.1
IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

> " "These days when it comes to career paths and architecture, it's the data that does the talking, not the maps."
>
> Steve Cunningham, Director of Talent, BT

The biggest development in the field of talent and careers over the last few years is an explosion of technology platforms and solutions. As we discuss throughout this report, career development is a multi-disciplinary undertaking, which must connect business strategy, workforce planning, learning and development, performance management, and resourcing, among other disciplines. In the past it has often proved difficult for HR to join the dots effectively between the different parts of the system. While many challenges to effectively deploying the emerging technology solutions remain, it's now within reach for organisations to connect different elements of the employee experience through technology. This includes using artificial intelligence to infer people's skills, recommend learning opportunities, and connect people with jobs and projects that meet their career aspirations.

In summary, the impact of technology is to enable a career model of the future (for both employers and employees). This is described by Josh Bersin who analyses HR technology, as "a world where people can work, learn, and progress all the time. In other words … a way to manage people so they know what they want to do next, the company offers lots of development and support in doing so, and new career opportunities are made available as part of everyday life."

New technologies put the tools for career planning, learning and internal mobility in employees' hands, supporting the philosophy of individuals owning their development. They also offer a potential solution to the question of how we can meet the expectation of personalised career support on a mass scale. David North said: "The rise of remote working, which makes virtual resources even more acceptable, and the learning potential of relevant digital development resources does offer the prospect of providing everyone with a high quality, foundation level of career building support." Here, we explore what some of these emerging technology solutions can do, and the main purposes they serve.

- **Providing dynamic, personalised tools for individuals to assess and plan their career.** For example, Fuel50 provides a suite of tools for employees to self-assess their interests and help them understand the motivators and values that drive their career choices. Employees complete a skills card, specifying their level of skill, and the degree to which they enjoy that type of work. They can record skills from their current role and those developed in other roles or with other employers. The system suggests personalised career paths, based on the skills, experience and qualifications of the user, and real life data of career tracks pursued by others in the organisation. Where an employee knows what role they are targeting, the system maps the typical career steps that might take them there. The system can also flag relevant internal vacancies or short-term assignments that employees could apply for in order to progress along that path.

- **Connecting the Learning & Development and Careers agendas.** New technologies are addressing what one interviewee described as the "black hole" between talent and learning, by improving the connection between opportunities, learning

> "Historically, career development has been sub-optimal because the three elements – careers, development and succession – aren't well enough linked. Each element happens in a separate organisational bucket and they aren't designed to come together. What's exciting about the new technologies is they bring it all together."

Natalie Jacquemin, Partner, HR and Workforce Transformation, Mercer

> "One element of building a developmental culture is to create a flexible and fluid environment where people can try out different things and work out for themselves what suits them."

Burak Koyuncu, Workforce Solutions Director, LHH

and progression. For example, Degreed has recently launched its Career Mobility platform, thereby repositioning itself away from simply being a learning experience platform, to serving up potential assignments and projects as well as recommended learning. Users complete a personal profile that's updated as they work through learning content on the platform. It serves up openings that they are a good match for, and suggests on-the-job experiences for people to grow skills for opportunities they're interested in. It also allows people managers to post assignments and search for candidates who will be a good match.

IBM's Your Learning platform nudges people to develop skills relevant to hot future roles which have been identified through strategic workforce planning, and suggests roles that an individual might wish to apply for. "We are sending corporate signals by suggesting 'badges' that people can work towards and relevant learning and job opportunities," said James Cook, Lead Partner, Watson Talent Development. "And we promote roles that are difficult to fill or are most in demand." The ecosystem tunes itself to the needs and interests of each individual learner. For example, it learns what type of content you prefer to consume – videos of less than three minutes, for example – and serves those up higher in the search results.

- **Increasing the transparency of skills in the organisation.** Mercer's Talent Trends research finds that two-fifths of HR leaders say they don't know what skills they have in their workforce. Now, vendors like IBM and Degreed are building skills clouds that can infer the skills that people have and identify gaps for development. Tools such as Faethm use analytics to identify which jobs are likely to need re-skilling, and suggest skill pathways people could pursue to get there. Whereas in the past, building a skills architecture would have been a huge, resource-heavy undertaking, tools such as Burning Glass crowdsource skills taxonomies by looking at millions of jobs posted every day. It also uses internal data such as CVs, performance reviews, social media posts and job experiences to assess the breadth and depth of skills in the organisation. IBM's system reads multiple structured and unstructured information sources and infers an individual's level of skills. "If you have enough data, you can infer with a fair degree of confidence someone's level of proficiency," said James Cook. "This takes away a major barrier to data cleanliness: requiring people to fill in talent forms which are already out of date the second they are completed." According to Josh Bersin, skills clouds are becoming the "internal 'Google Search Engine' for skills within the organisation."

- **Improving the connection between career development and deployment by supporting internal mobility.** Many companies have issues with internal mobility. A 2019 study by Deloitte found that 65% of respondents said it was easier to find a job outside the company than inside. A key trend that's helping to address this is the emergence of 'talent marketplaces' such as Gloat and Fuel50, that enable managers to openly advertise not only permanent positions, but also short-term assignments and projects. As we discuss throughout this report, careers develop through experiences on the job. This might involve a permanent job move, but it can be achieved through adding responsibilities to an existing role, working on a project, or doing a 'gig' on the side. Companies that are looking to build new capabilities quickly are increasingly encouraging employees to work on projects and build new skills alongside their permanent role. Businesses such as Google and Roche encourage their people to spend 20% of their time on development activities.

Career marketplaces can help to address one of the major barriers to successful career development, by providing an incentive for employees to keep the information they provide to the company about their skills and aspirations up to date. 79% of respondents to our survey agreed that a lack of information about employees' skills and aspirations was a barrier for their organisation. "The reason LinkedIn is the most accurate skills database in the world is because there's an incentive for each individual to keep it up to date," said IBM's James Cook. "You have to make internal systems as attractive."

79%

of survey respondents **agree that a lack of information about employees' skills and aspirations was a barrier to successful career development within their organisation**

CASE NOTES: UNILEVER

Recognising that the profile of its workforce is significantly changing, a key element of Unilever's plan to prepare for the future of work is to build the infrastructure to support people in upskilling, reskilling and developing employability. Over the last few years the company has upgraded its people systems and processes, and is now tackling the career narrative that sits across its people strategy. One expected shift, according to Nick Dalton, EVP HR, will mean being more explicit about using career moves as a way to develop specific skills. "In the past, we have developed people quite broadly, and the accumulation of skills has tended to be an outcome of moving people around rather than an objective in its own right. As our careers strategy evolves, developing skills such as digital will come much more into play in the choices we make."

The starting point for thinking about careers is to get people to reflect on and define their purpose. Over the last few years, Unilever has put its whole workforce through purpose workshops. "This gives people a clear frame to think about the skills they will need to develop, the routes that might take them there and how they bridge from one to the other," said Dalton.

To support this, Unilever has launched a talent marketplace platform – FLEX – which uses AI to match people to short term assignments and project experiences. It's currently being used for a specific purpose: enabling people to get experiences and build skills without having to change role. Project and hiring managers can post projects and gigs. Employees can create a profile, list their aspirations and indicate areas of expertise in order to receive recommended opportunities. "It's about developing in your current role while building additional skills on the side that you might need for the future," said Aimee Campbell, HR Director – Marketing, Consumer Insights & Media. "We were able to leverage FLEX during the Covid-19 pandemic to meet the immediate needs of the business and redeploy people as their roles changed, sometimes overnight."

FLEX, which has been rolled out to 60,000 employees across more than 100 countries, is built on the Gloat platform, and integrates with Degreed's learning platform. An employee who completes a piece of learning can then be alerted to an open assignment that might offer the opportunity to put the learning into practice. Analytics show where demand is greatest and allows the company to fine-tune its learning offer in response.

Another benefit of FLEX, according to Dalton, is that it democratises the internal network. "Whereas previously, people would have had to rely on word of mouth to discover opportunities, they are now public and available to all."

The introduction of FLEX is indicative of a shift away from a more directive approach to career development towards what Dalton describes as an adult-adult relationship: "Many people join large companies because they want and expect their careers to be managed. However, we are moving towards a model where we provide the infrastructure that allows the best talent to create their own careers by flowing to places in the organisation where they can realise their own individual purpose."

A next step for the FLEX platform is to connect strategic workforce planning and skills development. "The strategic workforce plan will identify critical future skills, which we can then feed into FLEX in order to nudge people towards developing skills that will both be good for their own development and for the company," said Dalton.

Opening up a marketplace of 'gigs', assignments and projects may require some rethinking around work and job design. Jill Foley, Managing Partner at On3 Partners, advises designing jobs to have 'elastic' boundaries. "Keep the boundaries of the job loose enough that people can take on new work or stretch assignments that will broaden their experience and help them develop new skills."

A limitation of career marketplaces is that sometimes career progression requires an individual to do a role they have never done before. It's hard to see how systems that make matches based on past behaviour or identify adjacencies to the current role will enable people to fulfil a longer-term career ambition or move into a completely different role. This is one of the reasons that managed moves and succession planning continue to be critical talent management activities. "Some of the moves companies want people to make, both for the needs of the business and for the developmental trajectories of their future talent, require active orchestration," said Wendy Hirsh.
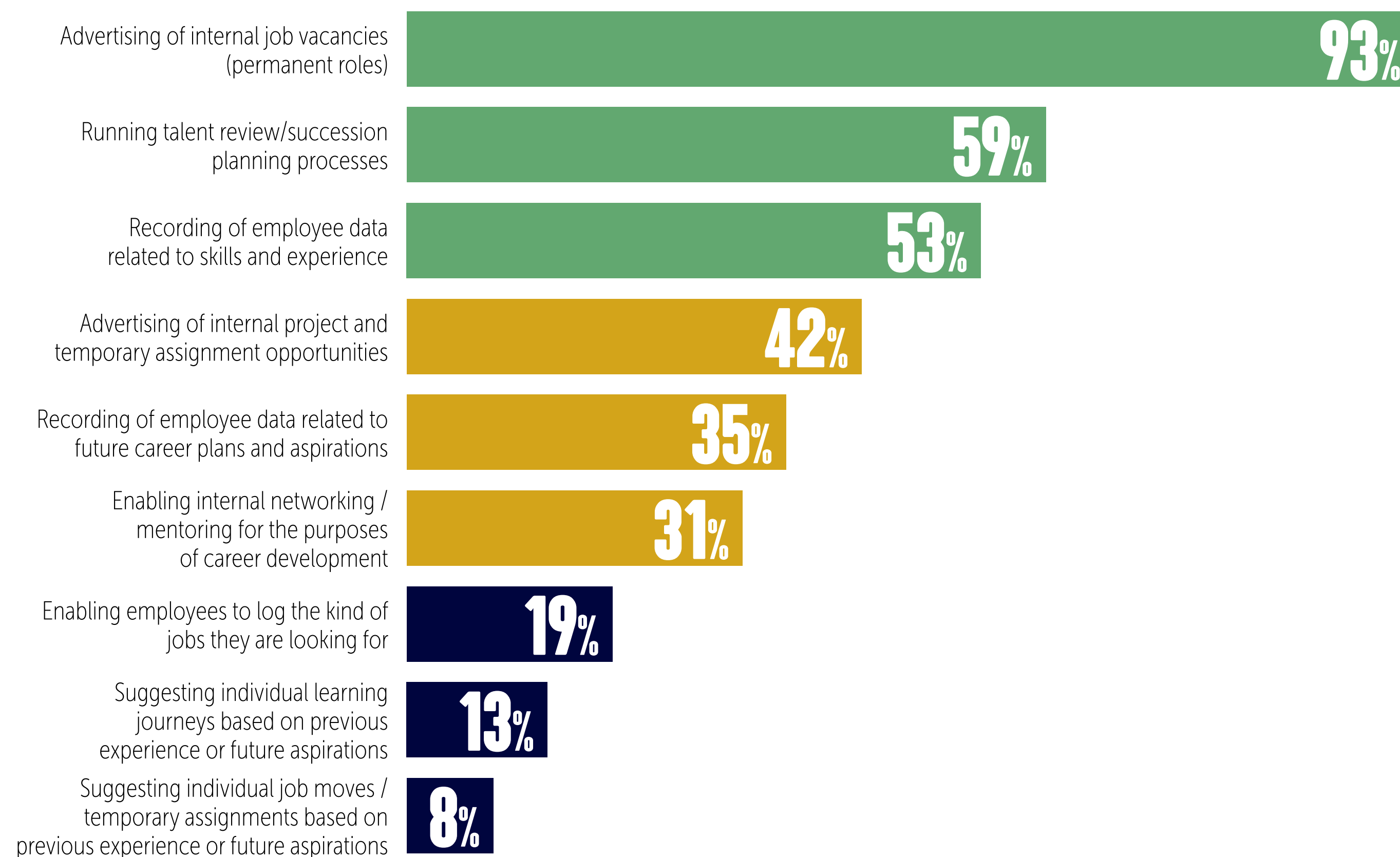
LHH's Burak Koyuncu said: "We experience this limitation of talent marketplaces a lot. While they help with the initial matching and guidance, they need to be complemented by some form of career coaching, career development workshops, and mentoring during the 'try and learn' period."

Successfully deploying talent marketplaces requires companies to address myriad practical and cultural issues that get in the way. Questions to resolve include:

- How much time can people spend on side projects?
- Should we deliberately design jobs to have spare capacity?
- Do people have to ask permission of their manager before putting their hand up for a 'gig'?
- How do we need to adjust performance management practices to recognise contribution to multiple projects?

- **Make it easier to access support such as mentoring and coaching.** Tools such as Gloat and Fuel50 can also be used to match people to mentors or to connect employees with someone who's already doing the job they're interested in. The low cost per employee of deploying these tools means it's becoming increasingly possible to offer them at scale across the wider workforce. Wendy Hirsh said: "What we typically only do for people on high potential programmes is exactly what more people want: feedback, learning about themselves, finding out about jobs options for someone like them, and help to access the experiences they need. We need to find good ways of scaling this up for more people."

FIGURE 17

Which of the following are currently enabled by HR systems/technology in your organisation?
Select all that apply.

Category	Percentage
Advertising of internal job vacancies (permanent roles)	93%
Running talent review/succession planning processes	59%
Recording of employee data related to skills and experience	53%
Advertising of internal project and temporary assignment opportunities	42%
Recording of employee data related to future career plans and aspirations	35%
Enabling internal networking / mentoring for the purposes of career development	31%
Enabling employees to log the kind of jobs they are looking for	19%
Suggesting individual learning journeys based on previous experience or future aspirations	13%
Suggesting individual job moves / temporary assignments based on previous experience or future aspirations	8%

> "We need to be able to give individuals clarity around the following questions: if I have these skills, what kind of work could I do? And if I want to do this kind of work, what skills will I need to develop?"

Cath Jowers, Head of Talent and Leadership Development, Anglo American

• **Better management information and analytics.** The new tools also give managers better information about their teams or allow them to access talent pools that historically would have been invisible. For example, Fuel50 allows managers to see the career motivators and aspirations of all their team members who choose to share their data, and also allows managers to build succession pipelines on the fly.

What is the state of adoption of technology in the talent and careers space? Our survey asked which elements of talent and careers were currently enabled by technology. Most common was internal advertising of permanent roles, deployed by 93% of companies. However, advertising of internal projects and temporary assignments is much less common, with only 42% of companies currently doing this. Just over half (53%) use technology to record employees' skills and experience, and even fewer (35%) record employees' future career plans and aspirations. In spite of the emergence of technology that suggests learning journeys or job moves based on an employee's previous experience or aspirations, take up is currently low, at 13% and 8% respectively. (See Figure 17).

In summary, while the adoption rates of some of the technologies described above remain low, we can expect the ongoing Covid pandemic to accelerate the adoption of technology in the talent and learning space. "Online skills taxonomies are now available, learning content is available digitally, the appetite for reskilling is there. People can't travel and have to adapt – it's a perfect storm for technology-led transformation in the talent space," said James Cook.

3.2
AGILE, TEAM AND PROJECT-BASED WORKING PRACTICES SUPPORT NEW WAYS OF DEVELOPING CAREERS

> "In terms of talent and career development, agility means more short-term assignments, rotations and on-the-job development experiences."
>
> Natalie Cetkovic, Talent Management Lead, Swiss Re

Another organisational trend that is influencing career development, is the wider adoption of flexible ways of getting work done through projects and Agile teams. Changes to working practices go hand in hand with technology developments discussed above: systems enable projects and short term assignments to be openly advertised and these in turn are delivered in project-based teams.

As organisations across industries are becoming more digitally enabled, they are frequently adopting Agile working practices and methodologies for getting work done. Agile is a project management methodology centred around the idea of iterative development, where requirements and solutions evolve through collaboration between self-organising cross-functional teams. Agile originated in software development, but is now being deployed more widely across organisations, including within the HR function. The reasons organisations are choosing to adopt Agile include that it enables organisations to be more customer-centric, to reduce time-to-market and to respond rapidly to changing requirements.

Not only does Agile change the way work gets done, it also affects the way work is organised and the roles of team members. Traditional organisations are built around a static organisation with clear hierarchies. In contrast, Agile organisations are run as networks of teams which come together around a specific task or mission.

Performance management and career development are also handled differently in Agile organisations. In traditional organisations, line managers are responsible both for work allocation and performance management in the short term, and for the longer-term career development of their team members. In Agile organisations:

- The role of the line manager in career development is often decoupled from day-to-day work
- Work is done in time-bound 'sprints' with team members organised in project teams (sometimes called 'squads')
- Squads have a coach who's responsible for facilitating and guiding the team, and removing obstacles to productivity
- Individuals might work across multiple project teams simultaneously
- Team members with similar skillsets or professional affiliations come together in 'chapters'
- Chapter leads are responsible for learning and professional development across their chapter.

CASE NOTES: ROCHE

Roche, the Swiss-based healthcare company, is moving towards Agile ways of working across the whole organisation. The company is built around clusters and chapters rather than departments. Individuals are 'tagged' with the role which represents their foundational work. Work is project-based and delivered by self-managed teams in time-bound work packages which are typically 30, 60 or 90 days long. Individual team members 'swarm' towards work packages. Individuals might work across multiple work packages at any one time.

For example, Andrew Armes, is Head of Talent Acquisition. His foundational work is to recruit great people into the organisation, and he does that as part of the Talent Acquisition Chapter. He is also a member of the People and Culture 'cluster'.

Cluster leads have oversight to ensure the core needs of the business are being delivered. They determine the work plan for the cluster. Squad, cluster and chapter leads have to work together to prioritise and allocate resource. They are also responsible for ensuring that squads not only include experienced people who can deliver the work, but offer opportunities for individuals to test out and develop their career aspirations by building experiences and new skills.

"It's not just about working out who could do the job," said Armes. "It's also about identifying who wants to learn to do that job and making sure there are opportunities for those who are motivated to accumulate new skills."

Squads are supported by coaches who help self-managed teams be productive and deal with blockages.

This approach to development is enabled by a company culture that seeks to tap into people's intrinsic motivations and is built on the principle that unlocking human potential leads to business success. "If you create an environment where people are free to develop, collaborate and learn, you are likely to unleash innovation," said Armes. In order to support this culture:

- People are hired for learning agility and self-awareness, not just technical prowess

- The company has rolled out a coaching framework to enable self-managed teams to support each other through coaching

- The company provides learning support and resources to help people reflect, and build self-awareness.

Individuals develop their careers in Agile organisations by building experiences of working across different squads, with career support provided by chapter leads or coaches.

Agile has many similarities with the professional services model of career development, which is gaining ground across a broader range of companies as project-based work becomes the norm. IBM has decoupled line and career managers, so the person who manages an individual's day-to-day work is not the same one who decides on promotions. "One thing you can do to increase internal mobility is to redefine the role of the first line manager," said James Cook. According to Josh Bersin, "Every company is starting to feel more and more like a professional services company. Individuals work on projects, teams, and roles – and then as the company changes and new opportunities open up, they move into something new when the time is right."

In professional services, performance is evaluated by a person's peers and the engagement manager on the projects they work on. Over time they develop a reputation as they move from project to project. Career development support is provided by a career counsellor or coach, who supports an individual's development and makes recommendations around promotions.

Some organisations are using other ways to uncouple career development from the organisational hierarchy. For example, Tesco looks at job families that span functions, such as project management. "Being able to move people across the organisation opens up a broader range of opportunities for people," said Anna Bradley, Head of Group Talent and Executive Resourcing.

For many organisations this also means rethinking performance management processes by moving towards greater transparency, ongoing conversations and 360-degree feedback.

04

DEVELOPING AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

FIGURE 18

CRF Integrated Career Development Model

DEVELOPING AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

It is a core belief at CRF that people processes should not operate in isolation. You have to view issues such as talent and careers in the wider context of the organisation, its business strategy, culture and alignment with other people processes. It's important to think about talent and careers as part of an integrated system: in order to be effective, all the parts have to align. We have developed a model – see Figure 18 – which summarises the key elements to consider in creating an effective career development strategy.

HOW TO USE THE MODEL

The model is designed to be an 'aide-memoire' to help you identify, plan and evaluate your current activity against all the elements that need to come together. Questions to consider when reviewing your current practice against the model include:

- Which elements of the career system are not working as effectively as we would like?
- Which parts are not as well interconnected as they could/should be?
- Are we clear how business strategy and workforce planning translate into career development priorities?
- Do we use the same language to discuss and describe people in

> "We have to be careful not to put all the focus on what the individual wants from their career. Careers have to link to what we need to achieve as an organisation, and we need to be clear how individual careers connect to long-term business goals."
>
> Claire Thomas, Director Organisational Development and Talent, Penguin Random House

> "It's critical to tie together cultural intent with leadership behaviours, and how we think about career growth, leadership development and performance."
>
> Jig Ramji, Group Head of Talent, London Stock Exchange Group

different parts of the system? For example, do we use the same criteria for external hiring vs internal selection, and if not, why not?

- Are top-down talent and succession processes well-integrated with bottom-up career activities?
- How could we improve the support we provide people to develop their careers?

1. DRIVEN BY THE BUSINESS STRATEGY

The business strategy drives choices around careers: which capabilities, job families or critical roles to focus on, where to make differential investments and whether to buy in talent or develop internally.

It's also important to make sure people understand the connections between the business strategy and their individual development. This means not only articulating the future direction of the business, but also giving suggestions and guidance about where employees could invest in their development to stay relevant.

2. CONSISTENT WITH THE ORGANISATION CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS

"Career development initiatives on their own, without an underlying developmental culture, don't make much difference," said Burak Koyuncu, Workforce Solutions Director, LHH. For investments in developing careers to bear fruit, the organisation culture needs to be one where talented people can develop and thrive. The most developmental organisations have talent development built into their corporate DNA. Senior leaders visibly drive talent processes – with appropriate support from HR. Managers are rewarded for developing talent – and those who hoard talent are penalised. Leaders act as role models by learning new skills themselves. The expectations of leaders around developing others are made explicit. For example, London Stock Exchange Group has included in its new leadership behaviours the requirement for leaders to move talent around the business. Leaders will be assessed and rewarded for developing talent, and the leadership development strategy will support them in learning how to do this.

It's also important that choices around the infrastructure that underpins career development are consistent with the culture and operating practices of the organisation. Implementing rigid career ladders in an organisation with an informal culture, or running highly centralised talent processes in a high-autonomy organisation, for example, are unlikely to succeed. Charlotte Mintern, Head of Executive Development, Careers at Associated British Foods, said: "Talent and career development processes need to be consistent with your culture and how the business operates. In a culture like ours that's highly devolved and autonomous, there might be times when, as HR and talent professionals, we get really excited about a new idea, but on further reflection we realise it's too hands-on for our culture."

3. THE CAREER DEAL IS CLEARLY ARTICULATED

The careers strategy needs to clearly define what the career deal is, who is responsible for what, and how it will be delivered. It needs to both meet the business demand for numbers and skills of people, and support organisational values.

- **What are our guiding principles?** These set the direction for talent and careers and need to answer questions such as: What is the organisation's philosophy around careers? Is the career deal the same for everyone or do we invest differentially in some employee populations or critical roles? How do we measure career progression – by development gained and contributions made or by promotion?
- **Who is responsible for what?** It's essential to set out the respective responsibilities of individuals, line managers and HR. See

> "You have to strike a balance between being cutting edge but not losing the cultural identity of the organisation and the people who work there. You can design something that looks and sounds amazing, but if it doesn't work in your culture, it won't stick."
>
> Celine Lammers, VP Leadership Succession, Shell

Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion about the respective roles of each.

- **How is career development delivered?** What is the baseline provision that's available to everyone? What additional support is provided to specific employee populations? What is the form and frequency of career conversations? How can employees access the support they need? What information do we provide to help people plan their careers and access opportunities to build the work experiences needed to develop? Is there a well-defined curriculum for development? How do employees flag their interest in developmental moves? Who pays?

4. ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER PEOPLE PROCESSES

It's essential that all parts of the people strategy pull in the same direction. The career processes and interventions which are implemented need to integrate with key people and business processes. In particular we need to consider the following:

- **Strategic workforce planning:** Defining what skills and capabilities will be needed, in what numbers and in what timescales.
- **Talent and succession planning:** Are our processes for identifying and developing high potentials and our career development practices integrated? Do our succession plans lead to tangible actions around developing the future capabilities our business needs? Do we understand and take account of the career aspirations of key people when planning moves?
- **Talent acquisition:** Do we use the same criteria for assessing external hires and internal development? If not, are there reasons for the discrepancies? Do we know where there are talent shortages in the external market, and how do we use that information to encourage employees to develop scarce skills?
- **Learning and development:** How easy is it for employees to access learning and development opportunities to help them realise their career plans? Do the objectives and priorities of our L&D strategy support the development of the critical capabilities we need to execute the business strategy?
- **Developmental experiences:** Does the information we provide about careers help people identify on-the-job experiences that could help them make their desired career journey? Do our processes for deploying people around the business help them gain access to job experiences that support their development? How do we help people access experiences so they can try out something they have never done before, or move across job families? How can we use 'gigs' and other short-term assignments developmentally?
- **Job and work design:** Does the design of jobs allow for people to develop new skills while delivering their day-to-day objectives? Are we making the most of projects, assignments and other methods of giving people learning experiences that do not require them to move roles?
- **Performance and reward:** How do careers conversations sit with the performance review cycle? How do we reward employees for developing themselves? Do we reward managers for supporting their teams' development? How do we reward leaders who put the immediate interests of their own business unit to one side in order to support talent flows across the organisation?

5. ENABLERS

- **Information on careers:** There can be value in sharing information about the broad career journeys an individual might consider across an organisation, and indicative career paths within and across job families. This information can be delivered in different ways – career paths are one option, but individual stories and case studies are others. Providing information about skills that are in short supply, or the future skills the organisation needs can also help people decide what skills they should develop to stay relevant.

- **Access to support from other people:** In Chapter 2 we discuss the risks of over-reliance on line managers to support individual careers. Often, people need advice from others, whether that's a career professional, a volunteer coach, members of a community of practice, or a mentor, on how to develop their career. Access can just be about having a conversation, but it can also mean a mentor or sponsor making an introduction or opening the door for someone to unlock a new career experience. It's important to consider how to provide support to junior employees at scale, not just for the elite or high potentials.

- **Communications:** As well as having the right processes and systems in place, it's important to engage people so they understand the career deal and know how to make best use of the available resources. Is there a clear strategy for communicating the career deal to employees? Do we test whether the communications plan is having the impact we would expect in terms of employees accessing and using careers resources?

- **Technology:** We discussed the emerging technologies in the careers and talent space in the previous chapter. Do our systems allow us to gather and maintain the information we need in terms of skills levels and aspirations of the workforce? Can we search the data in real-time? Do our L&D and careers systems work together? Can we access reporting and analytics?

- **Developing capability to support careers:** How do we train managers or help them in other ways to have good career conversations? Do we need to invest in upskilling HR to provide career counselling internally? Do we need to buy in career counselling or coaching? How should we equip individuals to manage their own careers?

6. EVALUATION OF BUSINESS OUTCOMES

As we saw in Chapter 2, there is much room for improving how HR evaluates the business impact of interventions around career and talent. It's important to evaluate the impact of interventions against business outcomes, to check they deliver against objectives, and to gather feedback in order to adjust and improve the processes. The process for evaluation should be defined up-front, not as an afterthought. The following are considerations to take into account:

- What business outcomes would we expect to achieve, were we to deliver against our objectives, for example increased sales, reduced costs, improved customer ratings?

- What measures would tell us that we are moving in the right direction? How would we gather and analyse the data we need?

- Which stakeholders will be most critical in determining whether the system is delivering business value? What are their expectations?

- Where do we need to make the biggest improvements?

CASE NOTES: SHELL

Shell, the global energy company, is a good example of an integrated approach to talent and career management. According to Celine Lammers, VP Leadership Succession, "We view this as an end-to-end talent value chain, and what's really essential is that the whole activity is underpinned by data."

The first link in the chain is strategic workforce planning. This takes the business strategy and future scenarios and translates them at a high level into the skills that will be needed over the medium-to-long term, where in the organisation they will be required, and what is the appropriate mix of home-grown versus externally hired talent. "One thing that makes the system work is that it is deeply grounded in the business strategy and outlook, not just the current reality," said Lammers.

An important element of Shell's philosophy around career development and succession is that experiences are at the heart of how people develop. "Experiences are a crucial part of our leadership model, and are key to how you develop as a leader and a person," said Lammers. "We are becoming more explicit and intentional about how experiences drive development. The most meaningful learning will come from those experiences which trigger self-reflection, and which offer the opportunity to learn from both success and failure". The company expects people to rotate jobs on a regular basis, depending on their individual and business needs. However, this doesn't mean defining rigid career paths – Shell is moving away from linear career navigators. It's more about accumulating critical experiences that offer breadth, depth, stretch, and the opportunity to collaborate with others. The philosophy of development through experiences is reflected in the design of Shell's talent and succession process and in the leadership framework.

Succession is a blend of succession planning for specific individual roles, and talent pools which focus on generic roles and building pipelines for the future. For the most senior roles and leaders, the leadership team looks both at the succession plan for each role, and the plan for individuals who are in those roles. Looking job by job, the conversation centres on the outlook for the person who's currently in the role, and potential successors. The conversation then looks ahead at the next few career moves for each person, identifying what experiences they will need in order to progress, and verifying that this will get the business to where it needs to be. There is also a clear focus to make sure proposed actions meet the company's diversity aspirations.

Talent pools focus on critical skills where it's essential to have a strong pipeline of talent. They help to place different lenses on the organisation: by business, geography, skill set and so on. For some groups, graduates for example, there is more infrastructure in place to guide career progression, support their development, and make sure career conversations with their line manager are happening as they should. There is one talent organisation which includes internal and external resourcing. Jobs are transparently posted on an internal system, and this ensures people have direct access to the right job opportunities. "This is really intentional, and we make it as transparent as possible by being clear which positions are becoming available," said Lammers.

Career development for the broader workforce is predominantly about the relationship between the employee and their line manager. "It starts with the responsibility of leaders to have development conversations and make sure the follow-through happens," said Lammers. "It's absolutely clear that's what's expected of you as a leader, regardless of whether you're a shift supervisor or a VP. Your role is to help your team members, to have and stimulate a learner mindset, and help them reflect on what's worked, where they might improve, and what they could do next." Leaders are, amongst others, measured on how they develop future talent. Individuals are held to be equally responsible for owning their career, supported by career systems and tools provided by the company.

Data is another key element of the system. Shell's talent strategy is underpinned by its internally-developed model of potential, which is used to identify and assess future leadership talent. The model assesses three factors: Capacity, Achievement and Relationships (CAR). CAR has been in place for decades and is regularly validated to check for effectiveness and bias. The CAR model is embedded in people processes from graduate recruitment to senior manager development, and individuals' potential ratings are regularly reassessed throughout their career. The company has determined leading and lagging indicators for each element of the talent system, which are regularly tracked and validated.

HR's ability to support effective talent management and to identify and take action where talent pipelines are getting blocked is enabled by a leadership culture that views talent as an enterprise resource. "There's strong collective responsibility for making sure movement happens," said Lammers. "It's only through the actions and ownership of leaders across the organisation that the behaviours stick."

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

> "There's a tension we have to manage. On the one hand there's demand for basic support that we are not meeting as well as we could. On the other hand, we are grappling with what careers will look like in the future, the expectations of younger generations, and questions about how long people will work for us in future. It feels like the moment for us to reimagine careers."

Cath Jowers, Head of Talent and Leadership Development, Anglo American

- New business models and strategies, technological change, and looming shortages in critical talent all mean that organisations are having to rethink their strategies for talent management. The ability to develop talent from within and reskill will be essential elements of the response required. It's an opportune time to review strategies for talent and career development so organisations have confidence that they are both able to attract, retain and engage the talent they need and make sure they have the skills required to execute their strategies.

- One of the most important things organisations can do to support career development is to make sure individuals have someone to talk to from time to time who is skilled in helping them think through their longer-term goals and shorter-term career options, can advise on opportunities available in the organisation, and can point them in the right direction for further information. Although organisations largely rely on line managers to do this, they rarely assess whether managers have the required skills, or provide adequate training or support. Upskilling HR professionals, developing volunteer career coaches, running career workshops or offering remote careers coaching are other options that organisations can consider.

- Development largely happens through on-the-job experience and putting new skills into practice. Organisations can improve their capacity to develop new skills by prioritising two things: (1) communicating to employees the future skills the organisation is looking to build; and (2) connecting individuals with opportunities to develop new skills, whether that's through projects, internal job moves, or making the current role more developmental.

- HR faces a dual challenge: getting the basics right while simultaneously preparing for the future. Our research has shown there is significant gap between aspirations about supporting careers and provision of the infrastructure required to deliver that. Looking to how organisations need to prepare for the future, this means having good information about the current skills profile and future skills needs of the business, and the goals and aspirations of the workforce, while finding ways for people to develop skills the organisation will need in future.

- New technologies in the talent field offer the opportunity to have much more joined-up thinking between business and workforce strategy, learning and development, resource deployment and talent and careers. For many organisations, however, shifting to a more transparent and joined-up view of talent is challenging. Key barriers to overcome include poor quality data, lack of leadership commitment to talent development and a culture that doesn't support talent mobility.

- While many organisations would say that talent and careers are becoming higher priority on the business agenda, they're not always backing up the messaging with sustained action. Developing an effective talent and careers infrastructure needs more than just good ideas and technology. It requires executive sponsorship, clear objectives, commitment and continuous improvement.

- None of the approaches outlined in this research are likely to be successful without having the right organisational climate that supports development. This is essential, and requires ongoing commitment and attention from both HR and business leaders. The measure of climate is not what leaders say about development, but whether they follow through with action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

> "Companies are aspirational about the importance of careers and the support they intend to give, but never quite get around to implementing their ideas in a sustainable way."

Wendy Hirsh, Employment Researcher and Consultant

> "Part of defining the career deal is to be clear about whether career development and promotion are the same thing. The messaging needs to make clear that careers don't always develop in a linear way – progression might mean moving sideways or learning a new skill within your current role."

Claire Thomas, Director Organisational Development and Talent, Penguin Random House

- **Clarify the purpose of investing in career development.** Who is career development for? Is it for the organisation – to improve organisational performance in the short-to-medium term or increase bench strength in the longer term? Or is it for the individual – to support personal growth or career advancement? It may be a combination of more than one of these four objectives. The important point is that each of these objectives will require different solutions, and will mean targeting resources in different ways. For example, building bench strength might mean disproportionately investing in assessing and developing high potentials, whereas supporting personal growth might lead an organisation to prioritise coaching and mentoring at scale.

- **Improve the connection between business strategy, talent and careers.** Are you clear about what your business strategy means for skills and talent? Does it articulate the future skills needed to deliver the strategy? Do your processes for talent and careers prioritise these capabilities? Do you communicate clearly the skills that will be needed in the future to leaders and employees, so they are equipped to make career choices that are in line with the organisation's future direction and ensure their future relevance?

- **Clearly define the priorities for talent and careers.** Is it clear what 'talent' means in the context of your organisation? Are there specific technical job families that are future business critical, as well as critical leadership roles? To what degree does your strategy for careers and talent need to be differentiated for different parts of the business or key employee populations?

- **Develop a common language for talent.** Do you have a framework, model or language for assessing and developing talent that is well understood by all the stakeholders who are involved in talent identification and development, and is used consistently to discuss individual performance and progression? If not, it can be extremely difficult to take a consistent, objective view of people, and make comparisons across different parts of the organisation. Shell's CAR model, described in Chapter 4, is a good example.

- **Clarify the career deal.** Define how responsibilities are shared between individuals, managers, and HR. Is the deal differentiated for some future-critical populations or skillsets? What resources are available to support the various players in the system? Do you need to invest in upskilling, e.g. running careers workshops for individuals or developing volunteer career coaches in HR?

- **Engage senior stakeholders.** Are they bought into the objectives and approach? Are they prepared to take action, for example to facilitate movement of talent across the organisation? How will you make sure they are held to account? Are they involved in communicating the career deal, sharing their experiences and stories? Is there a particular hot spot in the business, or a leader, who can give you an 'in'?

- **Weigh up whether your expectations around line managers supporting career development are realistic.** Do your criteria for appointing people into management and leadership positions include consideration of their ability to develop others? Do you provide training? Do you evaluate leaders' performance around talent development? Do you know who your best talent developers are? Do you recognise and reward them? Are line managers made aware of opportunities in the organisation so they can direct their people towards relevant openings?

- **Clarify HR's role.** Is there someone sufficiently senior in HR who's responsible for careers? How do they interface with other elements of the employee value proposition, such as L&D, talent and succession and performance management?

"Most executives today recognise the competitive advantage of talent, yet the talent practices their organisations use are vestiges of another era.
They were designed for predictable environments, traditional ways of getting work done, and organisations where lines and boxes defined how people were managed. As work and organisations become more fluid – and business strategy comes to mean sensing and seizing new opportunities in a constantly changing environment – companies must deploy talent in new ways."

Charan, Barton and Carey, Authors of
Talent Wins: The New Playbook for Putting People First

- **Focus on experiences as the platform for development.** Can you define critical experiences for key roles and career paths to help people map out the possibilities for themselves? Is it clear how individuals can go about acquiring those experiences? Are there processes in place to move talented people into the right experiences at the right time in their career? In what ways might you use technology to increase visibility of opportunities?

- **Communicate, communicate, communicate.** Is there a plan for communicating the career deal? Do people know what's available? Are resources easily accessible? Are the various elements such as learning platform, internal advertising of jobs, careers portal well enough integrated? How will you measure the effect of communications to make sure messages are landing?

- **Make sure top-down succession and talent processes and bottom-up careers development processes are joined up.** Do they target the same future capabilities? Should they? Are you explicit about how they link together?

- **Deploy technology and data.** How can you capture and maintain data about people's skills and aspirations and bring them into talent conversations? What incentives are there for people to keep their information up to date?

- **Develop supporting policies.** Do policies around internal transfers support (or hinder) people taking on additional responsibilities or working on cross-functional teams in order to acquire new skills? To what extent might you need to redesign jobs or working practices to open up opportunities for people to learn from on-the-job experiences? When do you advertise open positions versus using them to make planned moves? Do you need to adjust performance management practices to recognise contribution to multiple projects?

- **Evaluation and continuous improvement.** Is there a clear process for evaluation, with clear, measurable objectives? What's the baseline against which you are measuring outcomes? How do you capture and act on lessons learned?

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