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Career Management

Key concepts and terms

- Career anchors
- Career ladders
- Career paths
- Portfolio career
- Career dynamics
- Career management
- Career planning
- Protean career

Learning outcomes

On completing this chapter you should be able to define these key concepts. You should also know about:

- The aims of career management
- Career development strategy
- Career management policies
- Career stages
- Career management activities
- Self-managed careers

Introduction

Career management is an aspect of talent management but deserves to be considered separately as an important activity in its own right. This chapter starts with a definition of career management and its aims. It then describes the framework of career planning – the stages that careers can follow within an organization and the dynamics that govern career progression. The next section of the chapter covers career management activities, and the chapter ends with a discussion of how people can manage their own careers with help, as required, from the organization.

Career management defined

Career management is concerned with the provision of opportunities for people to develop their abilities and their careers in order to ensure that the organization has the flow of talent it needs and to satisfy their own aspirations. It is about integrating the needs of the organization with the needs of the individual.

An important part of career management is career planning, which shapes the progression of individuals within an organization in accordance with assessments of organizational needs, defined employee success profiles and the performance, potential and preferences of individual members of the enterprise. But career management is also concerned with career counselling to help people develop their careers to their advantage as well as that of the organization.

Aims

For the organization the aim of career management is to meet the objectives of its talent management policies, which are to ensure that there is a talent flow that creates and maintains the required talent pool. For employees the aims of career management policies are: 1) to give them the guidance, support and encouragement they need to fulfil their potential and achieve a successful career with the organization in tune with their talents and ambitions, and 2) to provide those with promise a sequence of experience and learning activities that will equip them for whatever level of responsibility they have the ability to reach.

Career management calls for an approach that explicitly takes into account both organizational needs and employee interests. It calls for creativity in identifying ways to provide development opportunities. Career management policies and practices are best based on an understanding of the stages through which careers progress in organizations.

Career stages

The stages of a career within an organization can be described as a career lifecycle. Hall (1984) set this out as follows.

Career stages

1.   Entry to the organization when the individual can begin the process of self-directed career planning.

2.   Progress within particular areas of work where skills and potential are developed through experience, training, coaching, mentoring and performance management.

3.   Mid-career when some people will still have good career prospects while others may have got as far as they are going to get, or at least feel that they have. It is necessary to ensure that these 'plateaued' people do not lose interest at this stage by taking such steps as providing them with cross-functional moves, job rotation, special assignments, recognition and rewards for effective performance, etc.

4.   Later career when individuals may have settled down at whatever level they have reached but are beginning to be concerned about the future. They need to be treated with respect as people who are still making a contribution and given opportunities to take on new challenges wherever this is possible. They may also need reassurance about their future with the organization and what is to happen to them when they leave.

5.   End of career with the organization – the possibility of phasing disengagement by being given the chance to work part time for a period before they finally have to go should be considered at this stage.

Career dynamics

Career management should be based on an understanding of career dynamics. This is concerned with how careers progress – the ways in which people move through their careers either upwards when they are promoted, or by enlarging or enriching their roles to take on greater responsibilities or make more use of their skills and abilities. The three stages of career progression – expanding, establishing and maturing – are illustrated in Figure 35.1. This also shows how individuals progress or fail to progress at different rates through these stages.
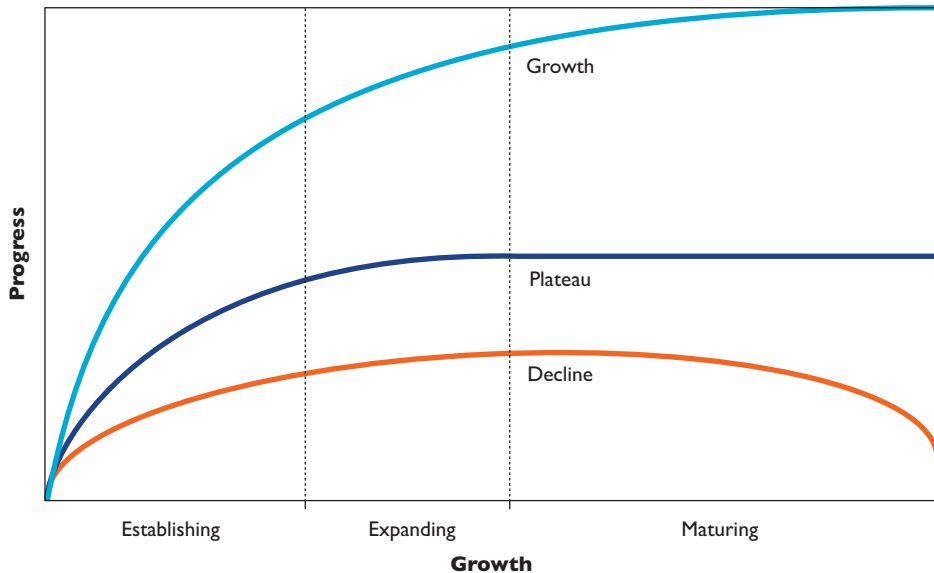
Figure 35.1   Career progression curves

Career development strategy

A career development strategy might include the following activities:

- a policy of promoting from within wherever possible;

- career routes enabling talented people to move from bottom to top of the organization, or laterally in the firm, as their development and job opportunities take them;

- personal development planning as a major part of the performance management process, in order to develop each individual's knowledge and skills;

- systems and processes to achieve sharing and development of knowledge (especially tacit) across the firm;

- multi-disciplinary project teams with a shifting membership in order to offer developmental opportunities for as wide a range of employees as possible.

Career management activities

As described by Hirsh and Carter (2002), career management encompasses recruitment, personal development plans, lateral moves, special assignments at home or abroad, development positions, career bridges, lateral moves and support for employees who want to develop.

Baruch and Peiperl (2000) identified 17 career management practices, and their survey of 194 UK companies established a rank order for their use. The practices are listed below in order, from most frequent to least frequent use.

Career management practices

1. Postings regarding internal job openings.

2. Formal education as part of career development.

3. Performance appraisal as a basis for career planning.

4. Career counselling by manager.

5. Lateral moves to create cross-functional experience.

6. Career counselling by HR department.

7. Retirement preparation programmes.

8. Succession planning.

9. Formal mentoring.

10. Common career paths.

11. Dual ladder career paths (parallel hierarchy for professional staff).

12. Books and/or pamphlets on career issues.

13. Written personal career planning (as done by the organization or personally).

14. Assessment centres.

15. Peer appraisal.

16. Career workshops.

17. Upward (subordinate) appraisal.

The process of career management

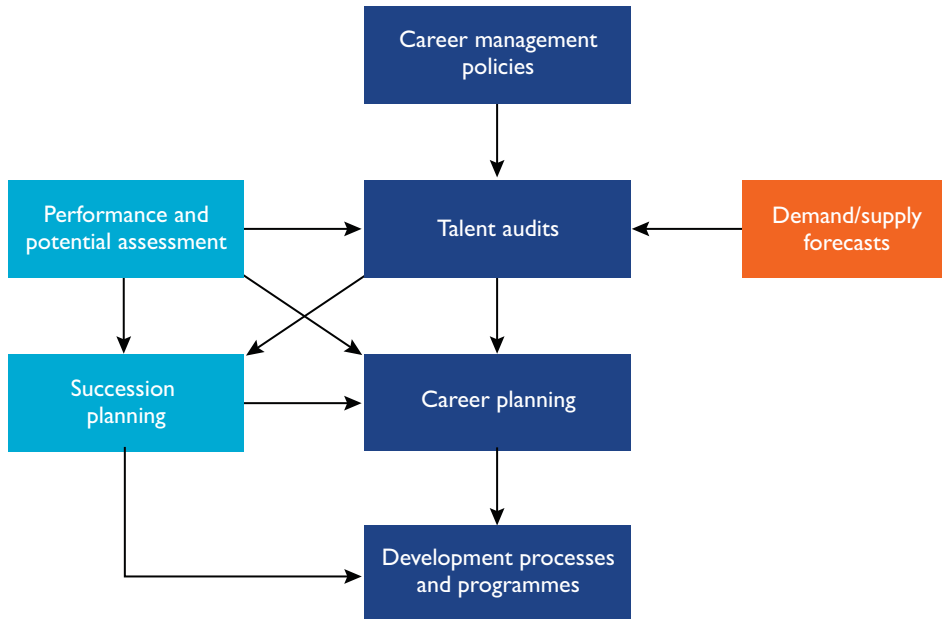The process of career management is illustrated in Figure 35.2.

Figure 35.2   The process of career management

Career management policies

The organization needs to decide on the extent to which it 'makes or buys' talented people. Should it grow its own talent (a promotion from within policy) or should it rely on external recruitment (bringing 'fresh blood' into the organization)? The policy may be to recruit potentially high performers who will be good at their present job and are rewarded accordingly. If they are really good, they will be promoted and the enterprise will get what it wants. Deliberately to train managers for a future that may never happen is a waste of time. In contrast and less frequently, employers who believe in long-term career planning develop structured approaches to career management. These include elaborate reviews of performance and potential, assessment centres to identify talent or confirm that it is there, 'high flyer' schemes and planned job moves in line with a predetermined programme.

There may also be policies for dealing with the 'plateaued' manager who has got so far but will get no further. Some managers in this position may be reconciled to reaching that level but continue to work effectively. Others will become bored, frustrated and unproductive, especially rising stars on the wane. The steps that can be taken to deal with this problem include:

- lateral moves into different functional areas or specialized subsidiaries, in order to provide new challenges and career breadth;

- temporary assignments and secondments outside the organization;

- appointments as leaders of project teams set up to deal with performance barriers inside the organization such as the slowness of responses to customer complaints.

Talent audits

These review the stocks of talent available and the flows required by reference to demand and supply forecasts and performance and potential assessments. They provide the basis for succession planning, as described in Chapter 34, and career planning, as covered later in this section.

Performance and potential assessments

The aim of performance and potential assessments is to identify learning and development needs, provide guidance on possible directions in which an individual's career might go, and indicate who has potential for promotion. This information can be obtained from performance management processes, as described in Part VII.

Assessment of potential can be carried out formally by managers following a performance review. They may be asked to identify people who have very high potential, some potential or no potential at all. They may also be asked to indicate when individuals will be ready for promotion and how far they are likely to get. The problem with this sort of assessment is that managers find it difficult to forecast the future for the people they are reviewing – good performance in the current job does not guarantee that individuals will be able to cope with wider responsibilities, especially if this involves moving into management, and managers may not necessarily be aware of the qualities required for longer-term promotion. But the organization does need information on those with potential and assessors should be encouraged at least to indicate that this is someone who is not only performing well in the present job but may well perform well in higher-level jobs. This information can identify those who may be nominated to attend development centres (see Chapter 45), which can be used to establish potential and discuss career plans.

Career planning

Career planning involves the definition of career paths – the routes people can take to advance their careers within an organization. It uses all the information provided by the organization's assessments of requirements, the assessments of performance and potential and management succession plans, and translates it into the form of individual career development programmes and general arrangements for management development, career counselling and mentoring.

It is possible to define career progression in terms of what people are required to know and be able to do to carry out work to progress up the 'career ladder' (the sequence of jobs at increasing levels of responsibility, which constitute a career). These levels can be described as

competency bands. For each band, the competencies needed to achieve a move to that level would be defined to produce a career map incorporating 'aiming points' for individuals, as illustrated in Figure 35.3. People would be made aware of the competency levels they must reach in order to achieve progress in their careers. This would help them to plan their own development, although support and guidance should be provided by their managers, HR specialists and, if they exist, management development advisers or mentors. The provision of additional experience and training could be arranged as appropriate, but it would be important to clarify what individual employees need to do for themselves if they want to progress within the organization.
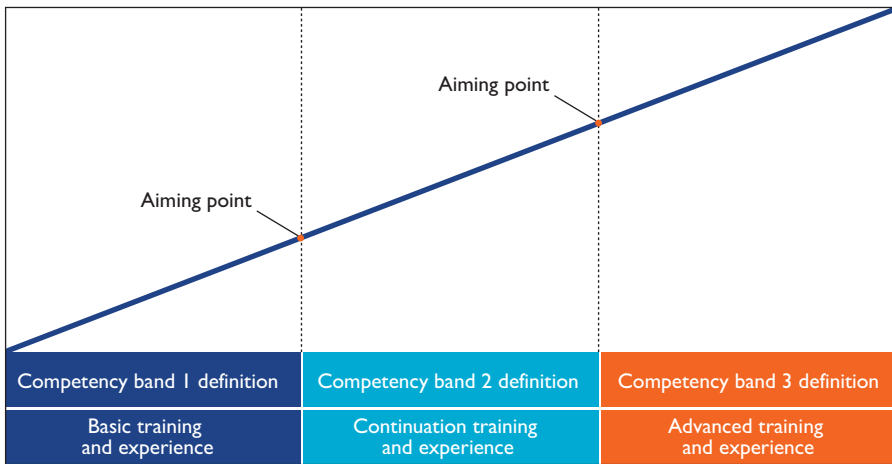

Figure 35.3   Competency band career progression system

As reported by Ready and Conger (2007), at Proctor & Gamble, 'destination jobs' are identified for rising stars, which are attainable only if the employee continues to perform, impress and demonstrate growth potential.

Career family grade structures, as described in Chapter 49, can define levels of competency in each career family and show career paths upwards within families or between families, as illustrated in Figure 35.4.
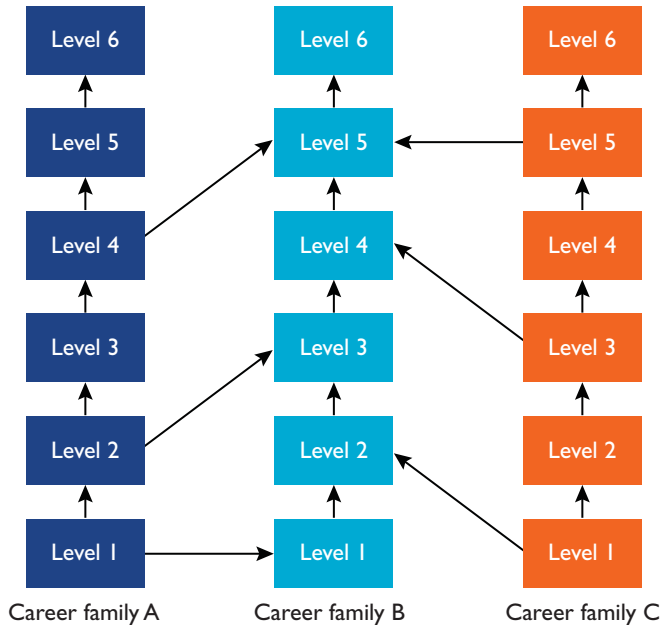
Figure 35.4 Career paths in a career family structure

Formal career planning along these lines may be the ideal but, as noted by Hirsh *et al* (2000), there has been a shift from managed career moves to more open internal job markets. The process of internal job application has become the main way in which employees manage their careers.

Self-managed careers

The organization may need to manage careers as part of its talent management and management succession programmes and can provide support and guidance to people with potential. Ultimately, however, it is up to individuals to manage their own careers within and beyond their present organization. Handy (1984) used the term 'portfolio career' to describe his forecast that people will increasingly change the direction of their careers during the course of their working life. Hall (1996) coined the phrase the 'protean career' in which individuals take responsibility for transforming their career path (the name comes from the Greek god Proteus who could change his shape at will).

Schein (1978) originated the notion of career anchors. He defined them as the self-concept of people consisting of self-perceived talents and abilities, basic values and a sense of motives and needs relating to their careers. As people gain work experience, career anchors evolve and function as stabilizing forces, hence the metaphor of 'anchor'. His original research in the 1970s

showed that most people's self-concept revolved round the following categories reflecting their needs.

Self-concept categories, Schein (1978)

1. Autonomy/independence.

2. Security/stability.

3. Technical-functional competence.

4. General managerial competence.

5. Entrepreneurial creativity.

6. Service or dedication to a cause.

7. Pure challenge.

8. Lifestyle.

The original concept of career anchors was developed at a time when jobs were relatively static and career paths within and between organizations were fairly easy to map. But as Schein pointed out in an update of his concept in 1996, jobs are increasingly becoming more dynamic and there is a shift from the provision of 'employment security' to 'employability security'. Calling on his experience in administering his career anchor self-analysis exercise, Schein claimed that while each of the anchor categories are still valid, they are more difficult to apply as the world of work and organizational structure become more turbulent.

Although the career anchor is designed as a self-analysis tool it can be used by career counsellors within and outside organizations as the basis for discussing career plans and how they can be realized, but it is necessary to consider the changing perceptions of people about their careers. Research on career anchors in a changing business environment based on interviews with 540 managers, carried out by Kniveton (2004), indicated that younger managers were more oriented towards their own skills and what they could contribute, whereas older managers were more inclined to be aware of the limitations of their role in the organization. It was stressed that this difference needed to be taken into account by those involved in career planning within organizations.

Career management – key learning points

The aims of career management

For the organization, the aim of career management is to meet the objectives of its talent management policies, which are to ensure that there is a talent flow that creates and maintains the required talent pool. For employees, the aims of career management policies are to give them the guidance, support and encouragement they need to fulfil their potential and achieve a successful career with the organization in tune with their talents and ambitions.

Career stages

- Entry to the organization.
- Progress within particular areas of work.
- Mid-career.
- Later career.
- End of career.

Career management activities

The five most common activities are:

1. Postings regarding internal job openings.

2. Formal education as part of career development.

3. Performance appraisal as a basis for career planning.

4. Career counselling by manager.

5. Lateral moves to create cross-functional experience.

Career management policies

The organization needs to decide on the extent to which it 'makes or buys' talented people (ie grows from within or recruits from outside). It also needs policies on talent audits and performance and potential assessments.

Self-managed careers

The organization may need to manage careers as part of its talent management and management succession programmes and can provide support and guidance to people with potential. Ultimately, however, it is up to individuals to manage their own careers within and beyond their present organization.

Questions

1. Drawing upon research findings, how might you use past assessments of an individual's strengths and weaknesses to help clarify their future development?

2. Critically evaluate Schein's concept of career anchors.

Questions (continued)

3. Identify and justify the guidance that you would give to line managers in your organization to ensure that they provide effective career management support to all members of their staff.

4. Review the career paths available for key occupations in your organization. What can be done to improve the process of career development?

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