

Shift career conversations from the ladder to the lattice

The types of career conversations that were traditionally held during outplacement processes are now becoming more common in retention and engagement strategies, says talent management expert, Rosemarie Denteseano.

"The idea is to be able to create opportunities for individuals to best match their skills, values and interests, to the roles that are available where they currently work," she told *HR Daily*.

Previously, these types of assessments were mainly conducted when transitioning employees out of a business, to "re-scope" their skills and abilities to help them find jobs externally.

But increasingly, Denteseano says, they serve two additional purposes:

- Firstly, career development conversations can help address the "talent mismatch" in many organisations, where particular jobs require skills and abilities not present in the organisation. Employers, she says, are becoming more willing to invest in reskilling, retraining and developing employees into these new jobs; and
- Secondly, career development helps organisations to keep pace with the expectations of individual employees, around development opportunities and choosing the work they want to perform.

"The world of work is changing, and people's expectations of work are changing," says Denteseano, the regional practice leader for talent management at Right Management.

"In the past organisations didn't have such a focus on building careers for people, and helping people look at roles both longitudinally and latitudinally. We typically thought about career as being 'up', whereas today we're seeing career can be sideways as well. So employers have had to rethink how they keep their right people within the organisation and help skill them to be doing the right work."

Some organisations are "scared" of career development because they think they're going to lose their workforce, if employees find they're not perfectly suited to their job, Denteseano adds.

"But the reality is it creates greater engagement. Career development really increases the individuals' engagement and allegiance to that organisation because they believe it is doing something really good for them, because it's helping them develop their skills and find the best job for them."

A business strategy, not an HR strategy

For career development to be successful in an organisation, "it really needs to be a business strategy, not an HR strategy", Denteseano says.

"As an organisation, senior leaders need to acknowledge that they really want to keep the talent they have, and that they're prepared to invest in development opportunities, and that they're prepared to have the career conversation.

"Years ago it would have been a career-limiting move to actually say that you wanted to do a different job. So it's about acknowledging that part of your strategy is you *want* to create opportunities for individuals to match their individual skill set with their values and the work that they do.

"The second piece is that you actually need to create a culture where it's OK to talk about career. What I mean by that is that from an individual point of view it's OK for me to talk about options... and because I'm talking about my career doesn't mean I want to leave the

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organisation - it actually means I want to look at how I can continue to learn and develop in the organisation I'm in - and secondly that my leader, or person who's managing me, actually has the capability and skill to manage that conversation."

A large part of the process itself is a detailed self-analysis, where employees identify their:

- optimal working environment - the type of environment they prefer and the way they work best;
- core values - Dentesano says it is "really important that employees' personal values align to the work they do"; and
- skills and my interests - "Quite often people know what their skills are, and they might know what their interests are, but it's the bringing together of skills and interests that actually gives you real alignment and play to the strengths".

Right Management's research shows there is a strong business case for introducing career development, finding that organisations that offer career development are:

- six times more likely than other organisations to have engaged employees;
- two-and-a-half times more likely to have productive employees; and
- four times less likely to lose their talent in the next year.

Further, organisations judged to be the best performers in their industry are three times more likely to provide career development opportunities than those judged as below-average performers, Dentesano says.

People leaders need career development skills

Right Management's research also found that 75 per cent of people don't believe their leaders have the skill or capability to have career development conversations, Dentesano says.

Most managers are equipped to have a performance conversation, she says, meaning they can manage people in their roles, and be "coaching and guiding and building the skill and capability for a person to do their current job".

But a career conversation requires leaders to, "step out of their role as your direct manager in your current job, and actually look at the opportunities available to you across the organisation and start to think about how, as an individual, you are an organisational resource, versus a member of their team".

"It does require some skilling capability to help people step away from the difference between coaching for performance in a current role and coaching for the career conversation. They're two different conversations that managers need to be able to have."