Research and development employees may not have to choose between research or management.

Innovation — and the world-class research and development (R&D) talent driving it — is more in demand than ever. Across industries, organizations are seeking groundbreaking ideas that will transform their businesses and product portfolios.

As the competitive landscape heats up and R&D budgets continue to shrink, the need for the best in technical talent to pioneer new approaches is paramount. Given the criticality of securing top-tier capability, organizations must ensure that they maximize their employees’ engagement and motivation through the right career infrastructure and recognition programs.

There is a simple solution that enhances innovation through greater engagement, retention and motivation: dual career tracks. For companies reliant on R&D, this approach encourages key technical talent to pursue either a path of strict research or one that can lead to or include R&D management. Dual career tracks increase employee engagement by allowing individuals to customize their career journeys based on their own interests.

Rather than burdening brilliant technical employees with managerial responsibilities, dual career tracks provide an alternate route focused on fulfilling the potential of employees who may have the skills for either — or both — technical and managerial excellence, but are at a point in their professional development in which their optimal career paths may not be clear to them or to the organization.

As business models transform at unprecedented speeds, companies must do much more than
adapt: They must set the curve through constant innovation. Industries grounded in R&D — such as pharmaceuticals, consumer goods and technology — will feel acute pressure to achieve transformative breakthroughs just to keep pace with their ever-evolving industries.

Talent Implications
At first blush, a dual career track may sound like a solution too fundamental for the lofty goals of driving innovation and growth. Yet, without an engaged R&D workforce — one that feels its contributions are well regarded, whether on the technical or the managerial track — an organization can suffer from lower productivity and unwanted turnover.

Nowhere is this more true than at the senior levels. Despite the overwhelming need for strong talent in all levels of R&D, organizations are faced with a pipeline of leaders who are not equipped with the skills needed to succeed in these roles. To drive and reinvigorate the leadership bench, organizations must:

- Identify those who may have been channeled into wrong career tracks or who are seeking a change.

Dual Career Tracks in Seven Steps
To foster innovation, organizations must become more agile by increasing the autonomy and accountability of their R&D talent. However, with autonomy comes responsibility, and companies must ensure they are entrusting decision making to researchers with a proven history of success. One of the most effective means of doing so is to develop strong talent pipelines that build leaders internally rather than buying externally.

To build a strong pipeline, organizations must begin by creating programs that resonate with today’s generation of researchers who value career flexibility. Dual career tracks allow researchers to grow with an organization, regardless of whether their interests lie more along the technical (individual contributor) or managerial track.

STEP 1
Engage Key Leaders
The first step toward enhanced R&D career tracks is to generate buy-in from senior leadership by making a strong business case about the potential business impact of this investment, including increased R&D agility, innovation and retention of talent. Having enthusiastic leaders champion the project will generate strong buy-in across the organization, ensuring that the tracks are successfully integrated into the organization’s culture. (See “Losing Great Scientists; Gaining Bad Managers” on page 36.)

STEP 2
Clearly Define a Visual Career Map
Next, create a visual map of the career lattice, which will serve as a guide for the project. This process involves conceptualizing the number of functions within R&D, the number of roles within each function and the number of career tracks that should be included. This map will also help identify opportunities for lateral movement and development opportunities further down the line.

STEP 3
Clarify Degree of Lateral and Upward Mobility on Scientific/Technical Track
Once a career lattice has been established, organizations must think about how employees can and should progress through the track.

A primary consideration is the trajectory of movement. Are there certain lateral movements that could help develop necessary business skills, or are functions so specialized that they require traditional vertical progression? The next consideration is the pace of movement. Are there certain roles/levels that are already saturated, creating chokepoints within the career track? These roles are easily identifiable as they cause frustration, resulting in employees leaving...
the organization. Velocity, or the frequency with which promotions occur, is another factor to consider. Strategic velocity can help avoid the creation of chokepoints and ensure that opportunities are available for those who are ready.

**STEP 4**
Clearly Differentiate the Scientific/Technical Track From the Managerial Track

A successful dual-track model clearly differentiates the responsibilities of individuals on each track. Technical career paths are distinguished by direct involvement with strategic and tactical scientific activities with limited or no people-management responsibility. While the managerial track also requires technical knowledge to support scientific activities, it also includes an element of business/administrative leadership and management. Successful leaders on this track possess a high level of business acumen as well as people- and resource-management experience. (See “Preparing for the Future State of Clinical Development” and “Fostering Innovation and Growth” on page 38.)

**STEP 5**
Explore Creative Rewards Opportunities

Similar to academia, recognition and rewards are critical components for success in R&D. Although organizations are increasingly moving away from financial rewards, there are many nonfinancial alternatives that can drive employee engagement. Nonfinancial rewards include recognition, increased responsibility, certifications and belts/stripes. In addition, organizations can also experiment with career rewards, such as lateral opportunity, executive visibility, greater independence, breadth of skills and freedom to pursue technologies of choice.

---

**Losing Great Scientists; Gaining Bad Managers**

**The Organization**
Global pharmaceutical company headquartered in the United States. A broad portfolio of products across several therapeutic areas focusing on unmet medical needs.

**The Challenge**
A lack of consistent career framework because of co-existence of multiple legacy structures as a result of acquisitions and consolidation.

Dual career track existed, with diluted integrity because of poor execution:

- Lack of clarity and consistency in expectations and movement criteria led to perceived unfairness and confusion.
- Innovation was compromised because scientists felt the managerial track was the only way to move up the track.

**The Approach**
A design team of senior leaders and high performers developed one global approach to career growth focused on business needs and future requirements.

New career tracks were created that clearly differentiated expectations for scientists and managers:

- The core scientific track represented technical experts with direct involvement in scientific activities.
- The management track represented business/administrative leaders with direct people management responsibility.

Based on in-depth reviews, a “principal scientist” level was created to manage velocity and movement of talent.

Within the core scientific track, a new “fellow” designation was created to dedicate a team to innovation and scientific breakthrough and to give a notable level of distinction to the scientific track.

**The Outcome**
The organization recalibrated its talent and reviewed and mapped each employee against the new career framework, including fellows, to align employees to the new structure. (See Figure 1.)

Employees regained confidence and trust in the new career structure and were energized and empowered to own and manage their careers.

One global approach, developed for and by R&D talent, helped create a new culture for the R&D function, removing legacy structures and differences.

---

**Figure 1**
Opening New Possibilities for Great Scientists Through a Dual Career Track
STEP 6
Describe the Journey in Detail
In order to provide employees with more ownership of their careers, organizations must clearly establish the expectations for each role, spelling out the details in each of the following areas:

Accountabilities: The “what” parts of job performance that are unique to each position and describe the scope, impact and degree of supervision associated with jobs at different levels.

Competencies: The “how” parts of job performance that describe the capabilities (skills, knowledge, behaviors) required for successful performance.

Technical competencies are unique to each role and function and describe the technical skills and knowledge requirements at each level and track.

Behavioral/leadership competencies are common across different functions and described differently for different stages of the organization.

Experiences: The guidelines for employee advancement that outline key qualifications and experiences required to advance to the next level.

STEP 7
Communicate Strongly
The final step is to communicate the dual career tracks to employees so that they are aware of the variety of growth opportunities, understand the tools available to guide them and take ownership in managing their careers. Communication should be engaging and the topic of managing careers should feel approachable — videos of current employees along each rung work well here.

In addition, managers must be trained to coach employees along this journey, walking them through their careers and keeping them engaged.

Conclusion
Effectively managed dual career tracks create a win-win situation in which organizations experience increased productivity and retention by giving more flexibility and autonomy to their R&D teams. When developing dual career tracks, embed into all HR processes and tackle the “not invented here syndrome” by soliciting input from key levels of the organization.
Fostering Innovation and Growth

The Organization
Global beverage company headquartered in the United States. Innovation and technology development operations in the United States and Europe.

The Challenge
Create a culture of innovation through a comprehensive approach to career management, including organization design, career paths, and innovation-focused competencies and learning resource guides.

I Provide clarity and transparency around opportunities for career growth and development, emphasizing lateral and global mobility.
I Motivate and engage talent and support development.
I Raise the performance bar, enhance productivity, and improve business and financial results.

The Approach
Leaders provided strategic insights on the types of innovation that will drive future growth.

I Define forward-thinking technical competencies.
I Develop future-focused and inspirational career maps highlighting destination roles, portfolio of experiences, and career trajectories that would broaden perspectives and enhance innovation.
I Develop experiential learning and training-oriented tools around capabilities for individual development.

The Outcome
Robust career infrastructure increasing motivation and engagement. (See Figure 3.) Structured approach to innovation.

Figure 3
Creating Nontraditional, Career Lattices to Explore Vertical and Lateral Movements

Multistage Zigzag

Early Career Zigzag

resources plus
For more information, books and education related to this topic, log on to www.worldatwork.org and use any or all of these keywords:
I Dual career
I Employee communication
I Talent strategy.