

# The Career Framework Strategy

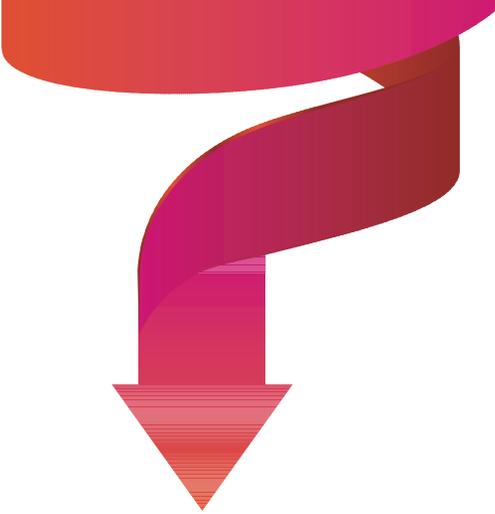
By Ilene Siscovick, Patrick Shannon, Ph.D., and Mary Ann Sardone, Mercer

Use a framework that supports career development and strong performance.

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**A**dvancing employee well-being — in terms of health, wealth and career — is the key to recruiting and retaining the best talent, and to ensuring a productive workforce and sustainable business results.

Organizations are learning that the workforce policies and practices in place today are, at best, the springboards to tomorrow's success — success not only in economic growth but also in employee engagement and, ultimately, employee retirement security. A crucial aspect of that success is organizational commitment to career progression. It calls for strong communication and transparency from management about how employees can be more effective in their jobs and grow their careers.



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But employers often fall short of that ideal, and need strategies for structuring career pathways — more accurately, a career frameworks strategy — so employees can advance in synch with organizational needs. Recent data reveal the urgency of the situation.

Mercer's 2015 survey, "Employee Views on Moving Up vs. Moving On," polled 1,520 employed workers in the United States and Canada, and found more than half (51 percent) say they receive "no input" or "input only once in a while" from managers on how to perform better in their roles.

More positively, Figure 1 shows 78 percent of respondents indicated they would stay with their current employer if they had a better sense of their career trajectory with the company. But other responses were more revealing: One-third (32 percent) of respondents consider their employment to be a job, not a career. Also, more than one-quarter (28 percent) had considered leaving their employer and moving to a competitor within the previous 12 months. When asked if their company makes it easy and transparent to understand opportunities for advancement within the

organization, 26 percent report "not at all" or "hardly ever."

The survey suggests that the dynamic interplay of multiple trends — a disenchanted, multi-generational workforce; skill shortages; global expansion; and gender equality issues — is creating real challenges for managing talent. But by outlining specific skill sets for career paths, organizations can help employees better understand growth potential within the company and improve overall efforts to retain and motivate their existing workforce.

That includes defining advancement opportunities and conveying related competencies in order to equip employees with the necessary information to grow professionally and financially. The result can be an optimized workforce that effectively contributes to business success.

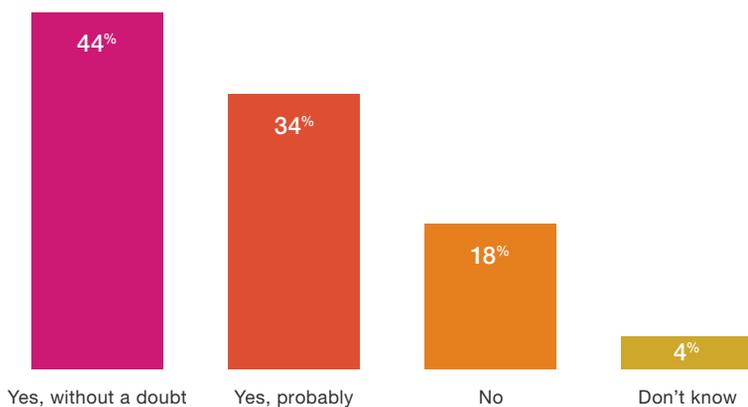
Yet revamping or updating a career framework strategy can be a daunting task due to the sheer scope and magnitude of the undertaking. Often triggered by the implementation of a new HRIS or a change in business objectives, a career framework is a strategic workforce centerpiece that guides how the organization's job architecture is structured, touching on all workforce initiatives.

Thus, the career framework clearly outlines the relevant career levels and job families within the organization. It clarifies how the levels reflect meaningful differences in impact and career progression and helps employees understand career options and development opportunities.

Depending on the size and scope of the organization, and whether the career framework effort represents a revamp in selected functions or an enterprise-wide undertaking, development can take anywhere from three to nine months or longer. Generally, organizations with 500 or more employees will feel the need to define a career framework and see such benefits as a clearer definition of work and roles, defined career

Figure 1 | Employee Perspective on Career Path

If you knew what your career path could look like with your current employer, would you stay longer?



Source: Mercer Snapshot Survey, "Employee Views on Moving Up vs. Moving On"



## Apps for Employee Career Paths

Employees often find it easier to look outside rather than inside their organizations for jobs that reflect their career interests and aspirations. But in today's technology-driven working world, there are new tools to enable employees to explore career paths with their current employers.

These can take the form of mobile applications, or apps, that provide a simple and compelling experience for employees who want to explore the competencies required not only for their functions but also for other roles across the organization. Such an easily accessible tool can help employees optimize their current efforts or plan for a desired future role.

The new generation of career-path tools are adapting themselves to the way employees live. Many employees access information via their smartphones, so new apps such as Mercer Career View enable them, wherever they are, to quickly explore roles across an organization's job functions, assess their competencies against the requirements of the role and model career paths to discuss with their manager. Too often this invaluable information is buried in a company's intranet or, worse, sits in three-ring binders on company bookshelves and never makes its way to the end user — employees.

Such cutting-edge solutions can reside as auto-updated programs on smartphones, tablets and desktops, making it easy for employees to determine the skills and expertise needed for success in other functions across the organization. In addition to providing employees with essential information to make sound decisions about their career progression, these new tools can also feature short video clips of colleagues discussing their jobs, with an invitation to contact them should the role be of interest to other employees as they map their career paths.

### The ultimate goal of these new career-path apps?

To provide an employee-centric solution for sharing information in a user-friendly way, while enabling workforce agility, driving employee engagement and ultimately reducing costs associated with turnover.

opportunities and higher employee engagement and retention.

In our work with clients on career strategies, the following five best practices to guide a career framework revamping project have emerged. These practices can help streamline the process, maximize operational efficiencies, achieve positive business impact and secure the strongest return on investment.

### 1 Prepare.

It starts with identifying a core project team that can outline the plan and time-frame as well as establish deliverables. This requires a deep understanding of each organization's strategy to know where it is going and the skills and competencies needed to deliver on that strategy. The core project should at minimum include HR business partners, compensation and organization effectiveness leaders and HRIS. The core team would also facilitate the identification of other key business stakeholders and subject-matter experts.

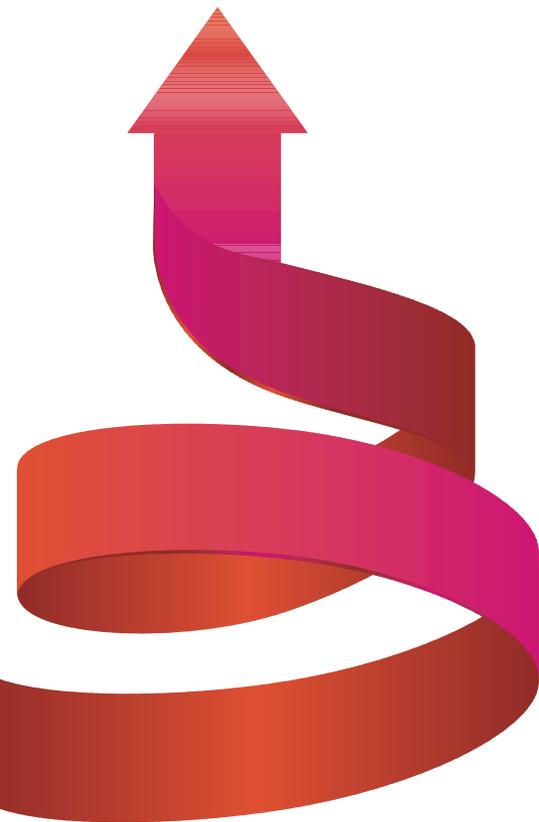
### 2 Advise.

Providing expert recommendations on what the preliminary future-state structure should look like, including the number of job families and subfamilies and potential roles required, is an important role for the core team and may include input from the right third-party adviser. The preliminary recommendations would be reviewed and refined through discussions with selected business leaders who are able to provide a perspective on current and, importantly, future business needs. Analytics should be used to assess the current talent pyramid. For example, a company could map its internal labor market, or flow of hires, job mobility and exits from the workforce against the desired future-state structure.

### 3 Develop.

The career framework structure recommendations are then translated into job-family and subfamily content through additional interviews with a broader set of business leaders

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and subject-matter experts and an analysis of workforce data. It is an iterative process and this is often the step where the engagement has the potential to get bogged down. If there are too many varying perspectives from subject-matter experts and leaders, it can be tricky to reconcile and create alignment. It requires strong project leaders to streamline and mitigate differences by providing clarity around roles and purpose, as well as to step in as negotiators when needed.

#### **4 Specify.**

The next consideration is to specify and validate the roles to be developed by working with job-family and subfamily experts within the job architecture. Subject-matter experts help to build out the requirements and responsibilities, along with the critical competencies, including technical and education requirements.

#### **5 Deploy.**

As the new career framework is deployed, change-management and communication experts guide managers and staff to help make the content engaging and gain greater user adoption and involvement, in addition to assisting with the HRIS integration. Various tools and templates to help clients with this process have become available in the HR consulting marketplace. (See “Apps for Employee Career Paths” side bar on page 25.)

There are many benefits to be gained from revamping a career framework. Employers have the ability to better attract, retain and engage employees by demonstrating career progression options. They can strategically map the growth of critical skills and translate business objectives into specific talent requirements. The process enables them to assign accountabilities, performance standards and competencies to roles while also creating easier benchmarking for rewards and benefits programs.

In addition, one of the greatest benefits of all is the ability to unlock big-data insights from human-capital management and build an infrastructure and comprehensive reporting systems for analyzing, managing and deploying talent. Ultimately, a career framework provides the infrastructure to anchor a cohesive talent strategy.

For employees, career frameworks provide the ability to understand how their role supports the business and know what competencies are needed, measured and rewarded. They can note the clearly defined steps for growth and increased pay potential and learn what’s needed to contribute day to day to deliver on the business objectives. Engagement is higher through the provision of insight into career opportunities and the ability to view equivalent roles across the organization. Ultimately, a career framework can help connect career development with stronger employee performance, ensuring profitable tomorrows for both the workforce and the organization. **WS**

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