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HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF THEIR EMPLOYEES?

KATE MANSFIELD OF CAREER COUNSELLING SERVICES INTRODUCES THE CAREER STRATEGY INSIGHTS TOOL

Marrying the perspectives of individuals and organisations on the topic of career development is undoubtedly challenging. Let's consider the perspective of each…

THE INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

Nadia studied Economics at Durham University. She joins her organisation as a Junior Business Analyst, hoping to move into a Project Management role within 3-5 years.

Nadia is very diligent and demonstrates excellent analytical skills. She receives encouraging feedback from her Line Manager on performance in her appraisal and a pay increase.

However, she finds it challenging to engage with her Manager on the topic of career development and to gain input on what she can do to 'move on'.

Nadia is highly ambitious and is beginning to feel dissatisfied that her vertical career has not progressed more quickly. She starts to question whether she is 'good enough' and whether she should begin to look for roles outside of the organisation, concerned about how it looks if she cannot show career progression.

THE ORGANISATION'S CHALLENGES

Nadia's Line Manager is nervous that he might raise false hopes if they talk about 'development'. He has had no training in career conversations.

The organisation does not have a culture where you can informally approach someone for a career conversation. The organisation's performance and reward system recognise 'upward' career movement, not lateral skills growth.

HR is aware of the challenges facing employees like Nadia. Still career development is not on the radar of senior Leaders and isn't recognised as part of business success or strategy.

We hear the frustrations of both parties on a regular basis, and the pandemic has exacerbated these challenges. Career Development, or a lack of it, is regularly cited as one of the top reasons why individuals leave their organisations. A recent Go1 Poll (September 2022) suggested that up to 60% of 2,000 adults surveyed claimed this was why they intended to move on from work. A PwC Workforce Survey (May 2022) found similar results of 68%.

Organisations cannot ignore the issues they face regarding employee retention, engagement and skills mobility. Many are highly aware that today's flatter organisational hierarchies can no longer offer the vertical career paths and structures of old. Instead, they must find ways to encourage individuals to be proactive within the organisation and develop themselves 'within' and 'across' rather than necessarily 'upwards'.

We have noticed over many years that well-intentioned career development initiatives tend not to last the test of time. Perhaps a sponsor leaves, or the organisation lacks the necessary resources, or there is insufficient integration with the business or people strategy. Senior Leaders are not on board and HR professionals lose motivation whilst employees become disillusioned.

Yet we firmly believe there are ways to marry the needs of individuals and organisations. As Dr Wendy Hirsh suggests in her foreword to our research findings, it is only really a 'half-truth' that individuals are responsible for their careers.

'Employers create the jobs we do; they have the power to choose who (sic) to put into those jobs and where to invest in the learning and development that people will need for those jobs'. Dr Wendy Hirsh, Institute of Employment Studies

In response to these challenges and to share the benefits of where we have helped Employers create lasting and successful career support, Career Counselling Services has created a framework and methodology called the **Career Strategy Insights (CSI) Tool**.

How does the tool help organisations to address these challenges?
The CSI Tool structures Career Development in organisations into critical component parts such as how

it is positioned, its formal and informal processes, the skills and support of managers, and evaluation. Through detailed sets of questions relating to each of these critical segments, organisations can plot out the specific career development issues they need to address.

The segments themselves, or critical factors, were drawn from our experience and case studies of where we have designed and delivered successful initiatives. We interviewed those responsible for Career Management in 13 organisations to test them. A representative from each organisation scored their organisations across the factors and participated in a qualitative interview.

The research findings aligned with our experience and broader research in demonstrating that there were significant gaps between the 'good intentions' of organisations and what happens in practice. Some of the gaps lay in how organisations communicate career conversations, policy, process, and share information and resources. Other gaps were in the skills and confidence of Leaders and Managers to have career discussions.

Three key over-arching themes extrapolated from both the tool and the research findings are summarised below. These three areas present a structured lens and way for organisations to design and deliver career development.

- Alignment of Career Development programmes with Business and People Strategy
- Clarity of purpose of Career Conversations
- Skills and training of Line Managers to have Career Conversations

The tool provides a critical stimulus and starting point from which to consider how to align career development with business goals and make explicit connections to retention, performance and mobility. In addition to HR professionals, business leaders can be asked to score the organisation on each critical area of the Career Strategy Insights Tool. It supports HR leaders to ensure that senior business leaders are involved in designing career development programmes from the get-go.

Secondly, and linked to the above, the tool can help organisations think clearly about the purpose of Career Conversations in their organisations. Links can be made to talent management processes and performance management. These links may help identify the various routes and rationale for having career conversations. For those designing initiatives, it encourages thoughts about various touchpoints for career conversations which might not just sit with managers but also with Coaches and Mentors.

Finally, the tool helps organisations consider how Managers can be enablers and not blockers to career development. This can be achieved by training them to have effective career conversations and educating them to signpost their teams to relevant career and learning resources.

Attention to these three key areas underpins a successful career management infrastructure which facilitates the development of proactive and agile employees who are keen to grow in a way that meets their own and their employer's needs.

If you would like to see the full copy of the research, please visit (career-counselling-services.co.uk/career-strategy-insights-tool).

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