

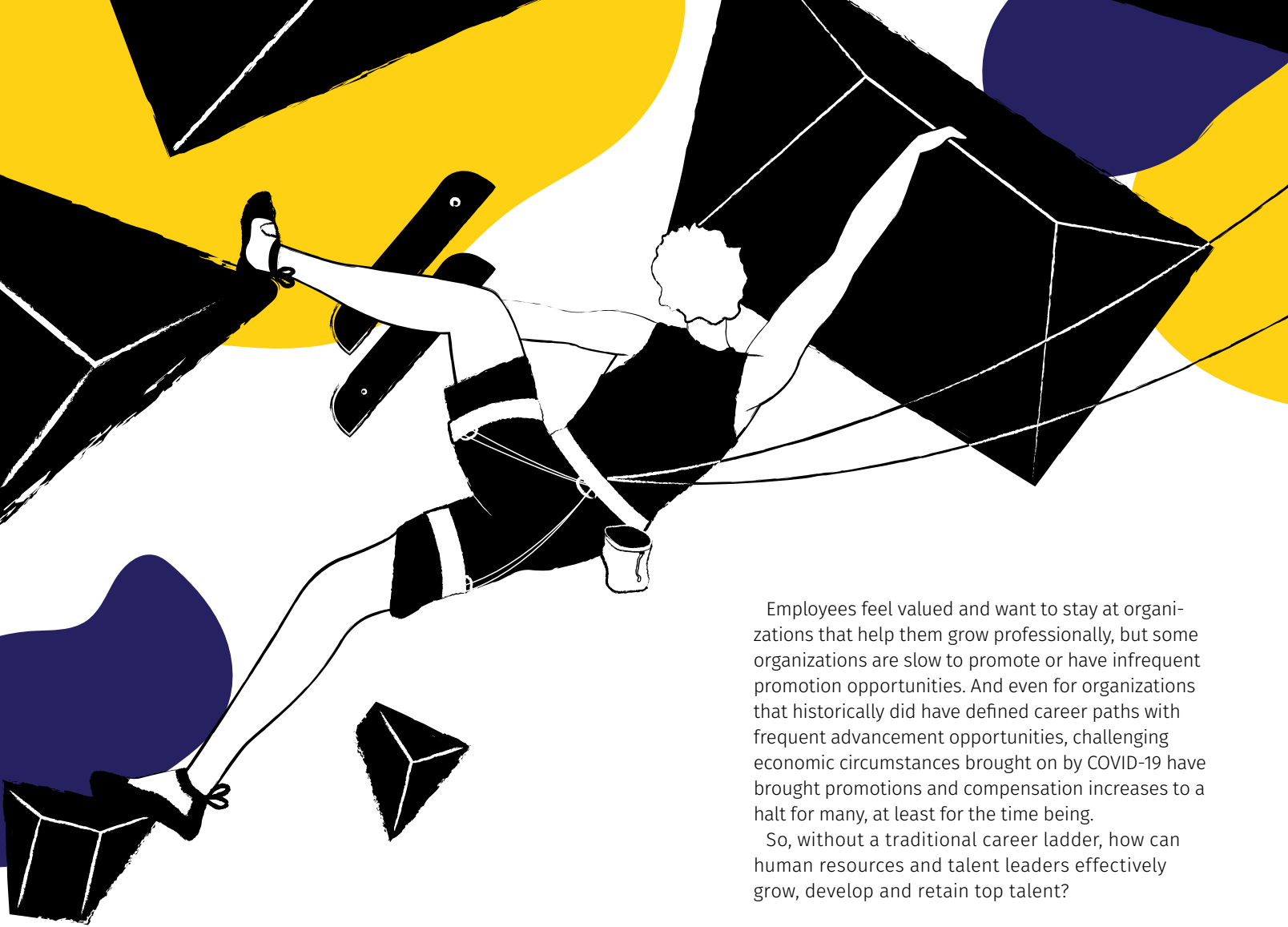
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*Talent Mobility
When There is
No Ladder*

BY ANITA BOWNESS



Employees feel valued and want to stay at organizations that help them grow professionally, but some organizations are slow to promote or have infrequent promotion opportunities. And even for organizations that historically did have defined career paths with frequent advancement opportunities, challenging economic circumstances brought on by COVID-19 have brought promotions and compensation increases to a halt for many, at least for the time being.

So, without a traditional career ladder, how can human resources and talent leaders effectively grow, develop and retain top talent?

UP IS NOT THE ONLY WAY

Internal talent mobility — moving current employees from role to role throughout the organization, either vertically, laterally or diagonally — is designed to optimize workforce productivity and performance, create a rewarding and fulfilling work environment, and maximize each employee's potential and contribution. Aside from upward career opportunities, talent leaders can create a culture of internal mobility by giving employees personalized growth plans that nurture their unique talents and aspirations. One way this can be achieved is by creating an internal talent marketplace or offering short-term “gig” assignments — project-based opportunities guided by the unique skills, interests and preferences of each individual.

Not only does offering employees project-based opportunities that fit their skills and interests boost engagement, retention and keep employees from getting bored, but it can also have a tremendous impact on business performance and innovation. Google's “20% time” policy, for example — where employees were encouraged to spend up to one full day a week on any personal project they felt would most benefit the organization — famously led to

“**W**here do you see yourself in five years?” It's a common interview question we've all likely asked and been asked. And, it is the rare individual that doesn't answer with some variation of, “I see

myself working here, in a managerial or leadership position.” But, is that even the right question to ask?

Career progression is no longer only linear, and traditional career paths and ladders are now far less common than they were even a decade ago. Instead of emphasizing promotions, job titles and climbing rungs of a ladder — the typical implication behind the “five-year plan” question — we need to dig deeper and think more holistically. We need to know more about what employees want to do, rather than what they want to be. And, we need to focus on understanding, developing and finding ways to leverage employees' skills and personal interests so that we can better engage, retain and get the best out of them — no matter what position they're in.

the development of some of Google's most innovative products, including Google Maps, Gmail and AdSense. And, who knows? Exposure to a new team or function through project-based opportunities could also open up possibilities for new full-time opportunities in roles or teams previously not on the employee's (or manager's) radar.

But while most talent leaders can agree that internal talent mobility is a good idea, it's not always clear how or where to start.

CREATING A CULTURE OF INTERNAL TALENT MOBILITY

Research from Deloitte reveals that, even though 76% of executives think talent mobility is an important priority, only 6% of survey respondents said their organization is excellent at moving people from role to role. And just 32% believe that their organization's employees have opportunities to move between operating divisions. So, why the disconnect?

Frankly, talent mobility is hard; it needs to be ingrained into the organization's culture to work effectively. As the same study from Deloitte goes on to reveal, "While organizations have spent decades building career and promotion models to help people move up the pyramid, that's not the same thing as having a vibrant, easy-to-navigate internal mobility market and culture across the entire organization."

Here are five tips for creating a culture of internal mobility that keeps your people motivated, engaged and growing.

1. TAKE A CUE FROM THE GIG ECONOMY.

Today, more than 55 million people in the U.S. are a part of the gig economy. The nature of the workforce is changing, and employees — especially Millennials and Gen Zers — highly value variety in their work. Offering temporary, project-based opportunities for employees to explore their interests and apply the full range of their skills — by matching individuals to project work, creating an internal talent marketplace, of sorts — is a great

way to keep employees engaged while also helping identify high potentials.

Let's say you have an employee in your engineering department who expresses an interest in marketing operations. Through a gig assignment, you might discover that their unique combination of analytical and technical skills helps amplify the success of your organization's marketing programs — and they may even find a new creative passion within your organization. Nine-box grids — which largely look at past performance — aren't the only, or even the best, way to identify high potentials. Since past performance isn't always an indicator of future value, offering gig assignments is a great way to mine the hidden potential that exists within your organization.

A talent development platform can help facilitate more effective performance and career management discussions.

2. FACILITATE ONGOING COACHING AND MENTORING.

By cultivating a culture of continuous coaching and real-time feedback, you can deliver a performance management experience that motivates your people and improves performance, while also delivering on your business goals. With effective, consistent coaching and mentorship, your people can develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to step into the next chapter of their careers. Technology can be a great enabler of this shift from "managing performance" to coaching for growth.

A talent development platform can help facilitate more effective performance and career management discussions. With 1:1 meeting and check-in

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tools, for example, employees and managers have a centralized way to track and collaborate on goals, exchange meaningful feedback, share progress and insights from special project assignments, and identify and discuss career development opportunities. Creating mentorship programs and employee resource groups (ERGs) to connect employees outside of their immediate work and leadership teams — or even using a talent management system to automatically connect mentors with mentees across your organization — is another valuable way to empower and develop your people.

3. EMBRACE A GROWTH MINDSET.

Claude Werder, an analyst from Brandon Hall Group notes, “Most leaders will tell you they want to promote more employees from within. But almost 60% of organizations from our research say their

Through collaborative goal setting, managers can help employees align their goals and interests to career development opportunities that support key business objectives.

internal talent pipeline is not large or deep enough. That reflects a lack of talent development.”

Since a different mix of skills, competencies and experience is generally required to successfully shift from one role to another, talent leaders need to equip employees to take on new roles by helping facilitate a continuous learning and development culture. By creating a flexible, personalized learning experience — one that supports both formal and informal learning activities — you can deliver meaningful skill and personal development opportunities

that set your people up for success. Tying development activities to those critical competencies or “soft skills” that link to your business priorities or organizational values should also be part of your skills development mix. And supporting hackathons, side projects and gig assignments — especially from the top down — is invaluable in encouraging and reinforcing a growth mindset across the organization.

4. BUILD FLEXIBLE, PERSONALIZED CAREER PATHS

Recent Brandon Hall Group career development research reveals that only about one in five employees has a clear and well-communicated career path, and less than one-third of organizations provide personalized development plans for the majority of their employees.

But to successfully navigate the constantly changing business landscape, your people need flexible, agile career paths that enable them to move in any number of directions.

After all, 85% of the jobs that will be available in 2030 haven’t even been invented yet. To keep pace with this change and readily adapt to the demands of the future, career paths need to be fluid and organizations should help their people adopt an agile career development mindset. Through collaborative goal setting, managers can help employees align their goals and interests to career development opportunities that support key business objectives — and adjust them as often as needed.

5. LINK LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT TO CAREER GOALS.

Personalized career paths are vital to employee growth, but unless employees also have the resources, guidance and direction they need to progress along those paths, they aren’t very actionable. Once employees have mapped out their individual performance and career goals, it’s important for employees to be able to identify

specific learning and development activities that will help them achieve those goals.

Using a talent management platform, employees can create career plans for the short-, mid- and long-term based on their skills, interests and aspirations. With these career goals mapped out, some systems can then leverage artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to identify skill gaps, suggest relevant training courses to fill those gaps, and even recommend suitable mentors to the employee.

UNLOCKING THE FULL POTENTIAL OF YOUR WORKFORCE

The dynamic nature of today's business environment, coupled with the changing needs and preferences of the modern workforce, requires us to reframe our approach to employee growth and development. A Gallup study reveals that "opportunities to learn and grow" is one of the top three factors in retaining Millennials, yet less than half of Millennials surveyed strongly agree that they have had opportunities to learn and grow in the past year.

Up is no longer the only way — or for many organizations, even an option right now — so talent leaders need to get creative and find other ways to offer the growth and development that employees crave and that will propel the business forward. Internal recruits are far less costly than external hires and prioritizing internal mobility can be a boon to employee morale, engagement and retention. It's why more than twice as many high-performing organizations prioritize internal mobility compared to their low-performing counterparts. But your people can't get there on their own. By actively promoting and facilitating a culture of internal talent mobility — giving employees the resources, technology and space they need for growth — talent leaders can nurture and develop the full potential that already exists across their organizations. **ws**

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