

# Corporate Partners Research Programme

Managing careers in large organisations

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# 1. Why does career development matter?

## 1.1 The purpose of this paper

How careers are managed in large organisations has far-reaching effects on both the organisations and their employees. But career development is a problematic subject for managers and HR professionals. Why?

- Organisations are very nervous of raising expectations around promotion, and also feel uncertain about what the future holds. The result is that most large organisations give their staff no clear or positive message about careers.
- 'Career development' is not a single intervention you can implement easily. It relies on a range of activities, involving several core HR processes, and requires these to be carefully integrated. As a result, considerable confusion prevails about what career development really is, with a consequent lack of confidence in how to deliver it.
- Career development is seen by HR people and most managers as 'nice to have' rather than as an essential part of people management; it is always the aspect of HR that they are going to get round to when they have the time.

The recent CIPD survey on 'Managing Employee Careers' (2003) supports this rather gloomy view. The respondents to this survey (who were HR professionals) showed a desire to improve career development for all employees, but in practice most of the effort went into relatively small groups of senior or high potential employees. Only a quarter of respondents had a strategy for career development covering all employees, and only a third felt that senior managers were firmly committed to career management activities.

In this paper we will argue that:

1. We need to be clear about what we mean by 'career development', and why it matters – both to individuals and organisations (Section 1).
2. We need to understand the context in which we look at careers – not just the organisational context, but wider

economic and social trends (Section 2).

3. We need to send clearer and more positive messages about careers and career development for all employees through a career development strategy (Section 3).
4. We need better ways of thinking about and implementing career development processes and practices (Section 4).
5. Part of improving practice is about clarifying who does what in career development – the issue of roles and responsibilities (Section 5).
6. The final section of the paper offers some suggestions for improving practice, and highlights some future challenges (Section 6).

Eleven organisational case studies underpin this paper and illustrate strategies and practices. All the case study organisations have a wide range of career development initiatives and activities. The illustrations given here are by no means a complete description of what they are doing. They are intended as selected illustrations of interesting, progressive or unusual approaches.

## 1.2 Defining 'career development' and 'career'

'Career development' is taken here to describe both the way an individual's career unfolds, and the various activities undertaken by the individual or their organisation to facilitate this. But what do we mean by the word 'career'?

We can see the career as strongly work focused, for example: 'the evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time' (Arthur et al., 1989).

We can also recognise other activities related to work as integral aspects of a career: 'a career is the sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and

experiences encountered by a person' (Arnold, 1997). Education and training are especially closely related to career development.

It can be useful to focus not just on the experiences that make up a career, but also on the transitions between these different experiences and how they are managed (Nicholson and West, 1988).

Some take a wider view of work within life: 'career is viewed broadly to stress life roles and lifestyles, occupation being considered only one part of career' (Hansen and Gysbers, 1975). The social context often influences individual career decisions.

It is helpful to recognise the distinction between the objective career (the list of jobs we have done) and the subjective career (how we feel and think about our experiences) (Jackson et al., 1996).

Some authors see the essential feature of organisational careers as the attempt to reconcile the different needs of the employer and the employee (King, 2004; Herriot and Pemberton, 1995).

### **1.3 Why career development matters to organisations**

- Careers are how higher-level and business-specific skills and knowledge are acquired. Employees undertaking sequences of work experiences progressively grow those skills. Key writers on careers in organisations see careers and learning as inextricably linked (Schein, 1978; Hall, 1976).
- Careers are how skills and knowledge are deployed and spread in organisations, as employees move from one job to another in response to where they are needed. Such deployment and knowledge sharing is critical to

organisational flexibility.

- Career movement is also how culture and values – the 'glue' of the organisation – are transmitted, and how personal networks are extended and strengthened.

Corporate culture and networks are often key to rapid and effective action.

- Career development is a major tool for attracting, motivating and retaining good quality employees. Purcell et al. (2003) found that providing career opportunities is one of eleven key practices that influence organisational performance. The Career Innovation Research Group has shown the link between the extent to which high flyers experience career support and their intention to stay with their employer (Winter and Jackson, 1999).

### **1.4 Why career development matters to individuals**

- Your career is your own life story; how you make sense of your working life and how you achieve some sense of direction and progression in work and inside yourself.
- Your career is how you manage your working life to earn income, and also how you balance work with your other interests and responsibilities.
- Career development is about being fully aware of your work opportunities, and making conscious and proactive choices about the kind of work you do.
- Career development is how you develop your skills and CV, and thereby improve your chances of future employability and avoid long-term unemployment.

So, careers matter and organisations should see them as a central aspect of the employment relationship, not an optional extra. Career development is of direct benefit to organisations, and should not be seen in terms of 'being nice' to staff.

## 2. The changing context of career development

### 2.1 How did we get to where we are now?

An important step in the process of delivering effective career development is to understand the changing economic and social context, and its impact on employees' expectations about their careers.

The last decade was dominated by uncertain and confused messages about employment and the future of work. As a result, many employers, responding to continuous change, seem to have taken a very short-term perspective, and focused on managing the present. They have lacked the confidence to set out a longer-term view of career and employment options. Even on the short-term horizon in which they operate, many employers do not seem to have capitalised on the opportunity to offer the type of flexible work opportunities that will attract, engage and retain employees.

One characteristic of the early-1990s recession was that it affected white-collar and professional employees. Possibly for the first time, it made employment security a big issue for many of these individuals (Herriot et al., 1996). Talk of the 'end of jobs' (Bridges, 1994), radically new models of career (Arthur et al., 1996) or even the 'end of organisational careers' may have got a bit out of hand (Guest and Mackenzie-Davey, 1996). However, there is little doubt that many employees are not only less satisfied with their work than they were ten years ago, but are also less committed to the organisation that employs them.

Several commentators have attributed this shift to a move from a 'relational' to a 'transactional' psychological contract (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995). Put simply, many employees no longer trust their employers' intentions, and as a consequence feel that their work future is now much less predictable. Such feelings have been aggravated for many older workers over the last few

years by increased financial insecurity caused by falls in the stock market and weakness in the pensions sector. It seems that economic risk is being transferred from large organisations (in which they invest or are employed) to individuals.

Negative outcomes are not only felt by employees. In the 'war for talent', organisations are often competing on a global basis to attract and retain the brightest and the best employees (Chambers, et al. 1998). Certainly, there is plenty of evidence that, early in their careers, these individuals are quite ruthless in pursuing their own career agendas, and feel little loyalty to the organisation that employs them. They are also often attracted to the idea of working in small organisations, like business start-ups (Graham and Jackson, 2001).

At a national level in the UK, policy initiatives in this area have focused on employability. This has been understood primarily as the need for life-long learning and continuous skill development that equips people to survive continuous change. Much effort has been put into encouraging any kind of participation in learning, especially for the least qualified. Such policies tend to assume that individuals can make wise choices in education, and navigate the labour market successfully without much additional support. This has led to the recent, lively debate of the need for life-long career guidance, as well as life-long learning.

LearnDirect (interestingly not called CareerDirect) offers some front-end advice, as well as information on courses. However, access to publicly provided career guidance for adults is still very limited and focused on certain groups, such as young adults and the long-term unemployed (OECD, 2004).

As a result, most people have to fall back either on their own resources or rely on their employers for career support. Several of the case studies presented in this report have considerably strengthened the career support they are offering their employees. However, the recent CIPD survey (2003) shows us there is still a long way to go and far more employers need to adopt a more proactive approach. We have already outlined the broad business case for career development, which argues for organisational action from a standpoint of self-interest. Effective action will also require employers to address the issues that will be influencing their employees' expectations and behaviour.

## 2.2 Changing career expectations for the 21st century

Employers need to understand that the widening diversity of employment opportunities is accompanied by a similar diversity in the employment expectations and aspirations of employees. It is particularly important to realise that these changing employee expectations will affect the shape of careers in the future as much as changes in business, technology and globalisation.

Many of the underlying factors that make workforce attitudes particularly important are not new, but employers ignore their consequences at their peril. Essentially, this is the mix of changing social expectations interacting with demographics. Key issues to grapple with include:

- **Lifestyle changes:** Young people are settling down later. This is partly a result of many more staying in education longer and therefore delaying their entry to work or taking several years before they establish themselves in the labour market. Some also choose to take time out to travel. Women are choosing to have children later, partly because they and their partners want

to establish their careers, but they are also influenced, particularly in the UK, by the high cost of housing.

- **Gender:** As more women work, especially in managerial and professional roles, traditional ideas about the sequence of a career become less appropriate. Most women want to have access to flexible or part-time working in early to mid-career, but not to give up all hopes of career progression as a result (Kodz et al., 2002). Many men are also affected by the career decisions of their partners.

- **Diversity:** The workforce is becoming more diverse, not just because of gender or because people from ethnic minority backgrounds make up an increasing proportion of young people, but also because of the wider range of routes taken through education, and with more people returning to education and then wishing to re-enter the labour market at a later age. Movement between employers and recruitment at all levels also means large organisations now take in recruits with very varied career experiences.

- **High potential, high career expectations:** The intense competition to recruit 'talent' has led to very high expectations around career progression and access to development among some of the most able employees, especially early in their careers. The promise of rapid career progression is often made, as is the promise of high quality career management. Such employees will complain and threaten to leave if these promises are not kept. Managing the careers of very able employees without pandering to their 'superbrat' tendencies is a real challenge.

- **Older workers:** Managing the late stages of a career will become a major challenge as the number of over-50s increases dramatically over the next decade. Fast-paced career progression has seen many organisations pensioning off their senior managers at this age. Less fortunate individuals with slower-paced careers and a

more uncertain financial future may have to continue working for longer than they had anticipated or be looking for new work because of the inadequacy of their pensions. Motivating and retaining this group will be a key focus for employers.

The impact of all the contextual factors summarised here needs to feed into the career development strategies adopted by employing organisations.

The longer-term implications of these changes for managing careers in large organisations are further considered in the conclusion to this report (Section 6).

## 3. Career development strategy

### 3.1 What is a career development strategy?

HR people are asked periodically to come up with a career development strategy. So, just what should this contain? A simple answer might be:

- an explanation of what the organisation means by 'career'
- a definition of the career development 'deal.' What is the organisation offering, and to which employees? What does the employee bring to their side of the deal?
- some principles and values about the manner in which career activities are undertaken
- a simple explanation of the processes managers and employees are expected to use in managing careers
- clarity about who does what, ie the specific roles of line managers, senior managers, HR professionals and so on – not just the roles of the organisation and the employee in general.

### 3.2 Some key elements of a strategy

In this section we will say a bit more about the first three of the above. Processes and roles are dealt with in Sections 4 and 5.

#### 3.2.1 What do we mean by 'career'?

In Section 1, we looked at some general definitions of career, and in Section 2 at some of the factors that are changing the nature of careers. It is important to stress that inside an organisation careers are not just about upward progression – although this remains an important aspect of careers. Careers are also about being able to move around the organisation to find work you enjoy and work where you will make your best possible contribution to the business. Job interest, variety and personal growth should not just be the preserve of the few.

A frequent message from organisations is that 'there are

no career paths any more', implying that the way we move from one job to another is entirely random. This is clearly nonsense (Guest and Mackenzie-Davey, 1996). The jobs we do condition the jobs we can do afterwards, which is why the CV is such an important currency. Career paths have become more flexible, but organisations still have them whether they want to or not. A clear, strategic duty is to explain those broad paths to employees. Organisations also have strategic choices about whether to encourage narrow paths or more flexible ones, including more lateral movement between types of work or business units.

The BP case study and accompanying Figure 1 (page 13) show how BP explains to its largely professional and managerial workforce the different kinds of careers it can offer. Other organisations define careers through key functions, skill groups or 'job families' that cover all levels of staff. Clear definitions of broad levels of work are also important to understanding career structures. Confusing or 'secret' pay and grading systems make managing careers almost impossible in large organisations.

#### 3.2.2 What is the career deal between the organisation and the employee?

Too often, career strategies are a list of what employees cannot have. They say that there are no careers for life, upward careers are limited, employees need to manage their own careers, and so on. They say a lot about what the employee has to give to the organisation – usually undying commitment, total flexibility, continuous learning and a willingness, should this be necessary, to be made redundant. These statements say almost nothing about what the organisation will give in terms of supporting career development.

What we need on the employer's side of the career deal

are realistic and positive career messages, like we:

- want you to progress your career for as long as you stay with us
- will try and get to know you very well so we can understand how to make the best possible use of your abilities
- will help you understand as much as possible about the business, its broad career paths and skill needs, and the changing labour market so you can identify realistic future career options
- will develop you by giving you a range of challenging work experiences
- will make sideways career moves genuinely accessible
- will work with you as an active partner in your career.

We will seek to increase the contribution you make to the business over time, taking full account of your aspirations and preferences.

It is perfectly possible to offer employees a more positive message about careers without being unrealistic. The Nationwide case study (page 14) is an example of an organisation that is upfront about wanting all its employees to develop their careers and offers explicit support for those who wish to do so.

### **3.2.3 Career deals with differing degrees of employer support**

Large organisations used to manage careers – often very badly – by managers simply moving employees from one job to another as they saw fit. In the early 1990s, their response to restructuring and downsizing was to tell employees that they were now responsible for managing their own careers (Hirsh and Jackson, 1996). Although this recognised the reality of an increasingly turbulent labour market and the demise of paternalistic employment relationships, this career deal – what we might call 'unsupported self-development' – was pretty hopeless

for both employees and organisations. Without a degree of support, employees lacked the information and understanding they needed to manage their careers effectively (Waterman et al., 1994).

The Nationwide approach is what we might call 'supported self-development.' That is, the employee takes primary responsibility for their own career, but there is extensive support, mostly information and advice, provided by the employer. Several cases in this paper show the shift from unsupported to supported self-development that has gained momentum over the last five years or so.

A career deal that is far more driven by the organisation is common for some employee groups. We might call this the 'corporate career development' deal. So, senior managers and often those identified as potential senior managers have careers that are far more actively planned by the organisation, and where job moves are engineered on behalf of the employee. In some organisations, senior specialists are included alongside senior managers in this more corporate approach to careers.

Between these two models is the deal favoured by many writers on this subject – a 'career partnership'. In this idealised model, the individual and organisation take equal responsibility for careers, and negotiate explicitly to meet both sets of needs (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995). The difference between supported self-development and partnership deals is quite subtle but very significant. Supported self-development often amounts to giving the employee more information and advice on which to base their career plan, which the employee then implements. A partnership career deal is different in three ways:

1. The employee's career plan is built by considering the ideas and preferences of both the individual and

the organisation, and is explicitly discussed and agreed as sensible by both parties.

2. The organisation shares the responsibility for implementing the career plan, especially with regard to supporting access to work experience and job moves.
3. These two features imply a third – that some 'agent' of the organisation (one person or a well-organised group of people) is there to do the negotiating, agreeing and supporting. In a self-managed deal, there can be many agents giving advice or information without much co-ordination or formality.

We see something aspiring to the partnership deal in some of the case study organisations, mostly those with a high density of employees in managerial and professional roles. Some graduate schemes also offer career partnership rather than a corporately-managed career.

In practice, most large organisations have a segmented deal – self-development (supported to a greater or lesser extent) for all employees, plus corporately-managed careers for key groups. It is particularly interesting to note that organisations espousing well-supported, self-managed careers for most employees are still pursuing corporate career development for selected groups of employees (CIPD, 2003).

#### 3.2.4 How can people expect to be treated?

Whatever the career deal, there may be some important values that underpin how processes take place, and how employees are treated. These form an important part of a career development strategy. Such principles or values may include: fairness, objectivity and meritocracy, openness, transparency of process, and respecting confidentiality.

### 3.3 Issues of fit and consistency

The CIPD 'Managing Employee Careers Survey' (2003) found that career management activities are partly, but not fully, integrated with HR strategy, and respondents did not feel that career management activities necessarily met business needs.

The case study examples show that the career development approach needs to be tailored to fit business needs, and the culture of the organisation. Several aspects of 'fit' are important:

- **Business and workforce fit:** A successful career development strategy fits the needs of the business, and also the characteristics and attitudes of the kinds of people it employs.
- **HR fit:** Career strategy, processes and roles need to align with wider HR strategies, processes and roles.
- **Internal consistency:** Career development processes need to be consistent with each other, especially in how jobs and skills are defined, and how information generated by one process (eg appraisal) is used by another (eg succession planning).

## Case studies: 1–2

### CASE STUDY 1

#### BP: Varied career paths for diverse business needs

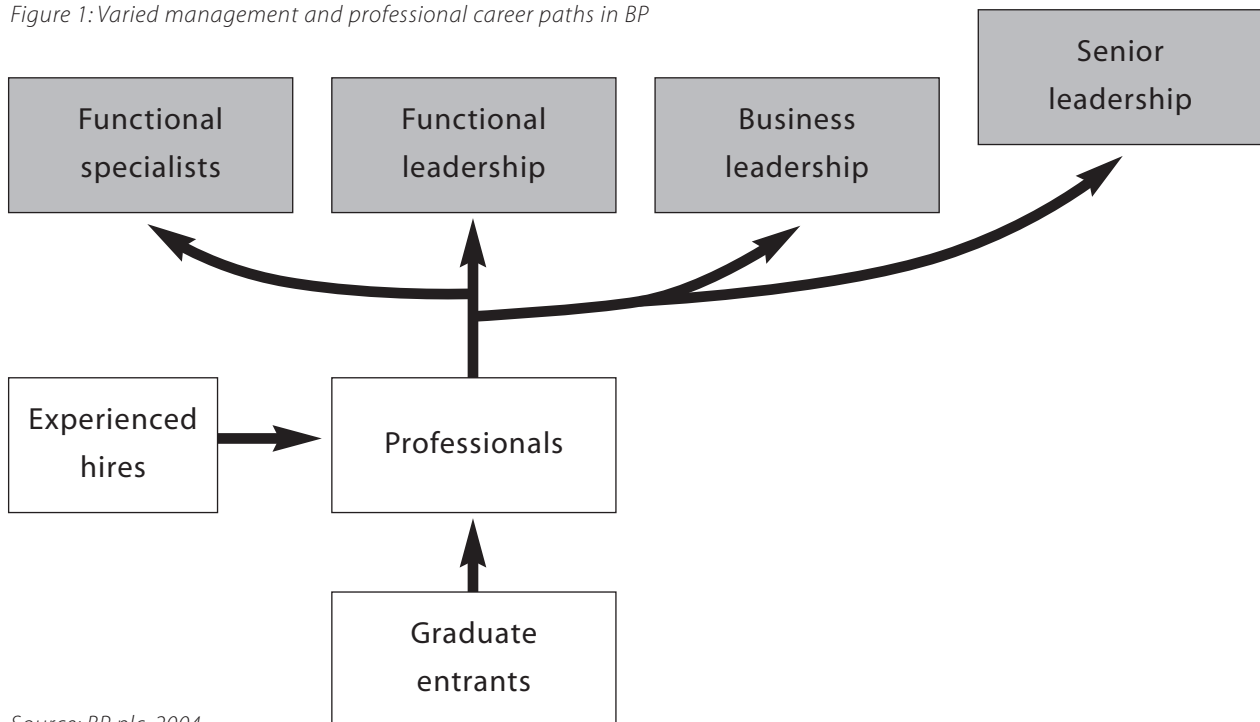
BP is a global energy company with around 116,000 employees. It is capital intensive, and the workforce is highly qualified. BP needs an approach to career development that fits its strong emphasis on people management, and meets its very varied needs for both technical and leadership capability.

Since the early 1990s, BP has emphasised the management of people, and both performance management and staff development are key facets of line management. Career development is seen as a partnership between the employee and his or her team leader. Employees are expected to initiate

their own development, formulate a personal development plan and discuss this plan with their boss. Employees can expect their line manager to give realistic feedback on their plan, and practical support in achieving agreed development activities or positioning themselves for career moves. Individuals at all but the most senior levels take the initiative in obtaining their own career moves by applying for vacant posts, which are internally advertised.

In parallel with this general approach, BP has for many years had corporate schemes for the active career development of relatively small numbers of potential senior executives. Although the approach has been modified over the years, it has always had an emphasis on giving high potential people a wide range of career experience, including varied functions,

Figure 1: Varied management and professional career paths in BP



Source: BP plc, 2004

types of business and international moves. In its current form, the Group Executive Development Programme covers about 130 people – selected in their late 20s to early 30s through assessment centres – and manages their development for 7–10 years. As BP has become more truly global, selection for this programme now looks for a diverse group of participants with cultural awareness as well as people skills and a strong track record of performance.

In addition to general managers, BP needs many functional leaders who, at the top of this career path, fill functional director posts. The business also needs senior specialists, with limited managerial responsibilities, in many areas of science, engineering and technology, and in commercial and support functions. So, there are broadly three different types of career path in BP as shown in Figure 1. Individuals can to some extent move across these career paths as the needs of the organisation and their own ambitions change.

Recently, the specialist career route has been strengthened through a professional recognition programme developed to promote individuals on their functional excellence, and to offer senior specialists equivalent recognition and rewards to those for business and functional leaders.

## **CASE STUDY 2**

### **Nationwide Building Society: positive career support for all**

Nationwide Building Society has about 15,000 employees, many of whom work in local branches. It has used a profit-chain analysis to demonstrate positive links between employee commitment, customer loyalty, sales, and profitable business growth.

Staff surveys in the late 1990s showed career development as an area of relative dissatisfaction for staff. Employees were unclear about what kinds of careers were on offer, and also

the processes by which their careers might develop. Over the last few years, Nationwide has developed a very positive approach to career development support for all employees, strategically linked to its business goal of achieving high levels of employee commitment.

A philosophy of career partnership puts the individual in the driving seat and offers to facilitate career planning and access to opportunities through comprehensive career information and advice. Care was taken to develop a career message that most employees could identify with. It includes: 'Making the most of your talent. Taking the most from your opportunities. Giving the best you are able to give. Preparing yourself today for tomorrow.'

A range of clear and visible mechanisms support this career strategy. First, individuals are encouraged to discuss their career with their line manager, using a simple 'Career Planner' framework. This discussion builds on, but is separate to, the annual performance review.

Second, the intranet offers a range of career facilities including self-help career planning tools, information on career options and specific job vacancies. Individuals can search for particular kinds of job vacancies or register their interest in the kind of job that interests them.

Third, individuals can contact the central Career and Leadership Development Team, who offer independent career advice through telephone and email. Career workshops are also on offer.

All these supporting mechanisms have been developed by a very small central team working in consultation with employees and in-house IT support. Their work was recognised in 2003 by a Personnel Today award for innovation in career development.

*Nationwide tracks how well it is seen as delivering on its career promise, and how this indicator moves against employee satisfaction, commitment and retention. Three-quarters of Nationwide staff say they have the opportunity for personal development and growth compared with under a third in the companies against which they benchmark. Lower than average staff turnover for the financial sector is estimated to save over £8 million a year.*

## 4. Processes for managing careers

### 4.1 Current practice

A sound strategy for career development is only the first step. Practical processes for delivering career development are also crucial.

Many HR processes can be involved in managing careers, and that is part of the problem. There are a number of useful reviews of career development, illustrating a wide range of practices, for example Arnold (1997), King (2004), Gratton and Hailey (1999), IDS (1999) and Baruch (2004). However, it is clear from the recent CIPD survey (2003) that organisations mostly rely on:

- career planning discussions that are supposed to take place as part of formal appraisal (or sometimes development review) with the line manager
- internal, open job vacancy systems that allow employees to see and apply for vacant posts
- a range of planning mechanisms and development schemes for employees regarded as being of particular value – succession planning and high potential or graduate development programmes are the most common of these.

This set of processes is a partial solution to the problem of how to manage careers, but it does have some important weaknesses:

- open job markets only help career development if employees already have a realistic career plan and know the kind of job they are looking for. The information and career advice to get employees to this point are often lacking. One consequence of this is the risk of some employees becoming 'job applicant junkies' – employees who spend a lot of their work time applying for jobs for which they are not suited
- relying on the immediate line manager to give career information and advice in an appraisal interview has two weaknesses: first, the appraisal process and second, the

boss. Telling employees to discuss their career once a year at the end of a long negotiation about pay rarely does the trick. In a study of effective career discussions, only 7% occurred in appraisals (Hirsh et al., 2001)

- this study also showed that over-reliance on the boss is a problem. Managers often have a limited view of career options and employees often do not wish to rock the boat with their own manager by raising the possibility of a career move. Lots of people have periods without a boss, or they have a boss they hate, or a very remote boss, or they have a rapid succession of bosses, none of whom they get to know well
- corporate career planning for 'special groups' is often better conceived, although rarely well and consistently implemented for any length of time. There is often insufficient dialogue with individuals, and development schemes in early or mid-career can come to an end without preparing employees adequately for managing the next stage of their careers.

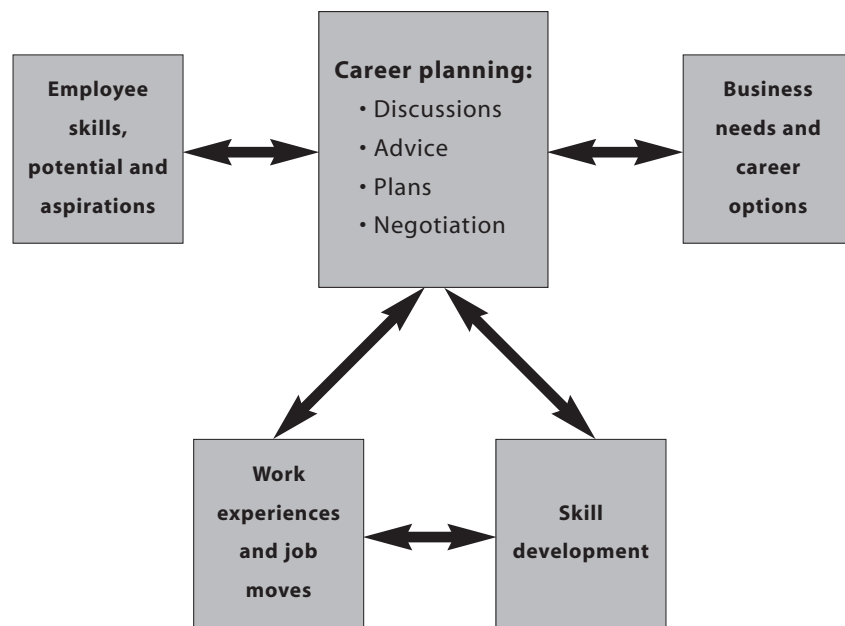
### 4.2 From processes to purposes – getting a clearer view

In reviewing or redesigning career development processes, it can be helpful to think first about what purposes a set of processes needs to address. Figure 2 is a simple model of such purposes. The model is based on simple ideas long used in career guidance that are related to bringing together a knowledge of the individual and their career options, forming a plan and then taking action.

The model is applicable whether we are looking at how to support employees in managing their own careers, or at corporately-managed career activities. The five main elements of the model are as follows:

1. Employee skills and aspirations is about understanding the individual. For an employee, this is self-awareness of

Figure 2: Underlying purposes of career development activity in organisations



Source: Hirsh, 2003

his or her values and aspirations. This is supported by feedback from the organisation on perceived performance, skills and potential. In organisational career planning, this is about the 'supply' of employees and their interests and preferences, as well as their capabilities and experience.

2. Business needs and career options is about career paths and levels of opportunity. For the individual, it is about understanding the career structure of the organisation and the kinds of jobs that might be open to them. In organisational career planning, it is the 'demand' side – the numbers and kinds of people needed, and shortages or surpluses.

3. Career planning is about using the first two information inputs above to frame career plans. For the employee, the career planning activity often involves having discussions and getting advice from various sources; identifying and

exploring options; framing plans; and possibly negotiating around some things for which they need organisational support (eg getting some training, an internal secondment, a sideways career move into another department, etc). In organisational career planning, succession planning includes sharing information, framing plans and negotiation, both among senior managers and, increasingly, with the individual employees involved.

4. Work experiences and job moves is about the all important processes that make job moves happen. These can be employee- or employer-led. They can also include ways of doing new things without necessarily moving job, eg job rotation, work shadowing, project working, secondments and assignments.

5. Skill development via formal training and education, and also work-based learning (eg coaching) is often required to bring a career plan to fruition.

As a rule of thumb, an organisation needs some way of attending to each of these five main components.

With this framework in mind, we will now look at some of the processes that can be used to support careers. Figure 3 shows just some of these. We can see that quite a few processes are used mostly for limited populations whose careers are being more corporately managed. Employees taking responsibility for their own careers use mostly what we might call 'core HR processes' – especially appraisal, training and the job filling process. The newer processes, illustrated by several of the case study organisations, are often aimed at improving access to career information and advice. Relatively informal

processes are very important in career management – in information and advice, in influencing job moves, and in learning (Hirsh et al., 2001).

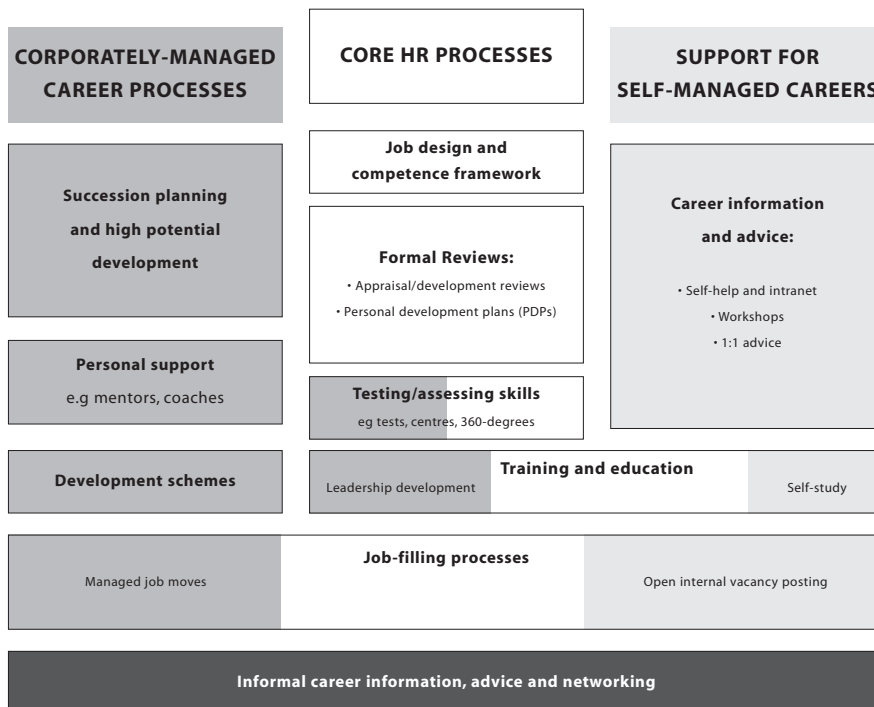
### 4.3 Corporately-managed careers

As we discussed in Section 3, much effort goes into managing the careers of selected populations, especially: very senior people, those seen as having the potential to reach senior levels, and some entry groups (especially graduate trainees). Special career-management processes tend to be used for these groups.

#### 4.3.1 Talent management

The processes for managing high potential and senior

Figure 3: Some processes used in career development



Source: Hirsh, 2003

people need to cover all five purposes and be strongly integrated. They often include special assessment processes (eg assessment or development centres, 360-degree feedback) that feed into succession planning and the selection of staff for high potential or accelerated development programmes. The fashionable term 'talent management' is used to describe a combination of succession planning and high potential development activities, while the term 'talent pipeline' is used to convey the need for 'talented' people at different career stages and often includes graduate recruitment as its start point. Explanatory accounts of succession and talent management processes include those by the Corporate Leadership Council (1997), Charan et al. (2001), Holbeche (1998), IRS (1997) and Hirsh (2000).

Corporately-managed career processes are also characterised as a collective process where assessments, business needs and possible career plans are shared between groups of managers. They often build in considerable dialogue with individuals to find out their needs and aspirations. Enriched skill development is often part of the deal for these groups, delivered through leadership development programmes and, increasingly, through the personal support of mentors and coaches. The career moves of selected individuals are usually engineered to some extent by the organisation.

Corporate career planning can easily become a paper process in which the senior managers involved become bored and disengaged. The Barclays case study (page 20) shows an example of re-invigorated talent management.

Corporate career development is very difficult for some organisations. In the public sector, for example, career moves are often from one organisation to another in national job markets. For example, this is the case in

local government, education and health. The NHS case study (page 20) shows how it may help for employing organisations in the same sector to co-operate in succession planning and the career development of future leaders.

#### **4.3.2 Organisational career management to meet particular needs**

Corporately-led career management does not have to be for senior managers only. Many early-career training schemes combine formal training with actively managed work experience. Graduate training schemes usually follow this model. Some organisations run mid-career development schemes, which pick up employees who need extra development in order to make a career transition – often into management.

The National Trust case study (page 21) describes a scheme, not restricted to graduate entrants, that is designed to grow scarce skills and help fill some of the Trust's key positions.

Where flexible deployment is very important, for example in many project environments, the organisation may largely control career moves. The HSBC case study (page 22) shows how an unusual method of managing the careers of relatively small numbers of people can meet both organisational needs and the aspirations of people who want truly global careers.

Conscious intervention in careers by the organisation can also be a way of increasing the representation of under-represented groups. The Metropolitan Police case study (page 22) shows how a special scheme can position women and ethnic minority staff better in order to access particular career paths at senior levels.

## Case studies: 3–7

### CASE STUDY 3

#### **Barclays: Refreshing talent management**

*Barclays is a financial services company with 75,000 employees worldwide. In 2001, the HR agenda was aligned more closely with business priorities. Leadership development and talent management were identified as two key areas for improvement.*

*Barclays had long practised succession planning, but the process was onerous and lacked a Group-wide perspective. As a result, the discovery of talent was ad hoc and subjective, and there was little development or movement of high potential people across the organisation.*

*A central Talent Team was charged with the task of refreshing and improving the end-to-end talent-management processes, including executive resourcing, succession planning, leadership development, middle-management talent identification and graduate recruitment and development.*

*The new approach involves senior managers working with HR business partners in a more collaborative way to identify and develop talent. There is less emphasis on paperwork, and more concentration on dialogues between senior managers, HR and high potential individuals. It is corporately managed for the top three organisational levels (roughly the top 500 posts), and more devolved for the 'emerging talent' below this level.*

*'Talent' is now defined through 20 characteristics Barclays looks for in its future Group leaders. These are grouped together under 'the three Es': be Exceptional (eg driving for success, stretching the boundaries), Edge (eg learns quickly, demonstrates sound judgement), and Energising (eg mobilises others, makes things happen).*

*The refreshed succession-planning framework has a strong focus on the distribution of potential so that areas of risk can be identified. It asks leaders what action they are taking to develop and deploy talent in their business area.*

*Talent Development Forums (TDFs) have been introduced to ensure that high potential people, identified during Group talent conversations, gain access to the key experiences they need to reach group-wide leadership roles. TDFs bring 'talented' individuals into a direct discussion with senior executives (outside their own line management), plus an input from HR. The process started with selected talent identified in the top three levels, and is now being extended downwards. The outcome is a set of agreed career development actions. The process has also helped senior executives get to know the high potential population better.*

*For the 'emerging talent' group of high potential middle managers, Talent Partners are assigned. These are senior managers who develop individuals towards Group leadership roles through an intensive coaching relationship.*

### CASE STUDY 4

#### **NHS: A sectoral approach to the career development of leaders**

*Succession planning and the proactive development of talent can be difficult in the public sector due to the fragmented nature of the organisations involved. Each NHS Trust, for example, has been responsible for its own succession planning and talent development. Now, in addition to strengthening access to qualifications for all employees, the NHS is adopting a more systematic, national approach to the development of senior leaders, managers and clinicians across the health service.*

*The NHS Leadership Centre provides a central focal point for the skill and career management of current and potential*

senior leaders. It has launched the NHS Leadership Qualities Framework and a wide range of development opportunities, including the recently launched scheme, NHS Leaders.

NHS Leaders is the health service's first national succession planning and career development scheme. It is aimed, initially, at the 1,000 most senior leaders in the NHS across England (ie chief executives and directors). The national scheme is being supported by two, more local, pilot schemes in eight Strategic Health Authorities. The scheme will work with local NHS Trusts and Authorities to identify managers and clinicians with the potential for senior roles, and then facilitate their broader career development across a range of NHS employers.

Jacqui Stewart, Director of Career Development and Succession Planning at the NHS Leadership Centre, comments: 'NHS Leaders puts career development on a far more structured platform. Besides being supportive and developmental, it encourages good practice and a systematic approach to senior recruitment.'

More information can be found on [www.nhsleaders.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsleaders.nhs.uk)

## **CASE STUDY 5**

### **The National Trust: Careership Scheme for gardeners and wardens**

The National Trust is the largest independent conservation organisation in Britain. It is also the largest independent landowner in England, Wales and Northern Ireland with over 200 gardens and more than 200 historic houses in its care, and with over 3 million members, the largest membership organisation in Europe. It employs approximately 4,500 staff and also has nearly 40,000 volunteers working alongside staff.

In response to a decline in training opportunities and concerns about the future supply of gardeners and countryside wardens, the Careership Scheme, in its current format, was established by the National Trust in 1991.

Careership is a three-year training programme for gardeners and countryside wardens that combines college-based residential training with practical experience, either in one of the National Trust's gardens or at one of the many areas of coast or countryside that it looks after. The training programme is designed to develop the expertise required to look after historic gardens, parks and the countryside.

Trainees are employed under an experienced Head Gardener or Warden who has a track record of training staff. Over their three years on the scheme, they become part of the local team using the learning and experience from college to develop their practical skills.

At the end of their training they will have acquired a Level 3 NVQ, along with relevant specialist qualifications in either amenity horticulture or environmental conservation. The programme intersperses college-based training in residential blocks of 1 or 2 weeks with practical work experience at the garden, coast or countryside area where they are based.

Careership is open to both school leavers and career changers (some of whom have been university graduates). Currently, 21 people are recruited into the scheme with 13 places in amenity horticulture and eight in environmental conservation. Many trainees have gone on to work for the National Trust, but some have joined other organisations. It is not unusual for someone to go off to work elsewhere before coming back to work for the National Trust. Some also go on to complete further qualifications, such as an HND in Forestry.

Not only has Careership ensured the supply of gardeners and

countryside wardens for the National Trust, but it has also added to the national pool of skilled gardeners and wardens.

### **CASE STUDY 6** **HSBC: A corporate pool of International Managers**

HSBC is a major financial services organisation employing about 239,000 people and operating in over 80 countries. In its early days, HSBC was based in Hong Kong and managed by 'International Officers', who were largely British expatriates. More recent acquisitions have made HSBC truly global. Its corporate centre is now in the UK.

HSBC has retained a specific group of 'International Managers' (IMs): a modern version of the historic expatriate workforce. They are recruited into the International Managers Programme (IMP), both direct from higher education and internally from the existing workforce. There are about 380 International Managers at present, with 25–35 recruited each year. The IMs are mainly commercial bankers; the career group still providing much of the bank's general management.

The career deal for IMs is quite clear. They take a conscious decision to opt for a career in which they can be sent anywhere and at any time. The IMs offer the business high commitment and extraordinary deployment flexibility. In return, the individual has a good employment package, a wide range of challenging jobs in many countries, and good career prospects leading to general management positions.

About 1,000 HSBC staff are working outside their home countries at any one time, so the IMs are by no means the only people who spend some of their careers working internationally. As business needs change, the IM career approach will continue to adapt. The current strategy is that the IM pool will be maintained in future and still form an

important part of the corporate approach to talent management. However, IMs may not dominate senior management to the extent that they have done in the past, and there will be more diverse career options for people with high potential. Diversity will also increase in the IM group to include people from more varied functional backgrounds (for example, in IT and marketing), and to include specialists as well as general managers. The careers of IMs also need to be more responsive to changing social needs and attitudes. IMs may in future be able to opt for limited periods of reduced mobility at times when their families need more stability.

### **CASE STUDY 7** **The Metropolitan Police: Increasing diversity**

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is Britain's largest police force, with over 29,000 officers and more than 12,000 civilian employees. The force has been concerned for a number of years to attract more women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds into the police service. While these initiatives have had some success, the proportion of women and ethnic minority officers at senior levels in the CID has remained considerably lower than elsewhere.

As a result, the Female and Ethnic Minority Detective Training Programme (FEMDTP) has been developed. The aim of the programme is to take female and ethnic minority Inspectors and Chief Inspectors working in other branches of the police service and put them through a tailored development programme lasting 12 months, after which they would be in a position to apply for jobs as a Detective Inspector (DI) or Detective Chief Inspector (DCI). The programme currently has six participants a year, and the first cohort is just coming to the end of training.

Each officer selected to join the FEMDTP is given a diagnostic interview to evaluate the current level of investigative skills

and experience. This information is used to develop a bespoke development programme, which is designed to meet individual needs. They are also given the opportunity to attend relevant training courses, such as the Initial Management of Serious Crime (IMSC) course and Senior Investigators Course.

Once they have completed the 12-month programme and had their competence assessed, the officers are eligible to apply for jobs as DIs and DCIs in CID under the open competitive selection process.

The MPS has put considerable resources into the development of the programme. Fourteen assessors have been trained to NVQ A1 standard, and the FEMDTP is to become a City & Guilds-accredited NVQ centre in the MPS Crime Academy. The MPS feel that external accreditation of the programme is essential for its credibility in the MPS and to ensure its professional status. It is also anticipated that external accreditation and the training of assessors will increase public confidence in the quality of crime investigations.

The FEMDTP programme is planned as a three-year rolling programme and is advertised nationally for new participants. One Chief Superintendent has commented: 'The introduction of vocational qualification-based, on-the-job assessment allows me to deploy recently recruited officers to critical roles, months – and, in some cases, years – before our old reliance on "experience" would have allowed. In fact, I no longer trust "experience" as an indicator of job competence; I am not happy to see established officers in critical roles in which their competence has not been formally assessed.'

## 4.4 Supporting self-managed careers

By definition, most employees are not part of any special population that the organisation actively manages in terms of careers. However, some of the most exciting developments in large organisations are those that seek to plug the gaps in support for more self-managed careers – especially the gaps of information and advice.

### 4.4.1 Information on career options

A number of case study organisations have been developing better ways of explaining broad career options and career paths. The BP diagram shown earlier (Figure 1, page 13) is one such example. Nationwide uses a 'job family' model so employees can find jobs in other parts of the business. Lloyds TSB (page 25), Rolls-Royce (page 26) and several others have information available freely to employees that helps them explore the kinds of careers on offer and the skills required.

Information on how career processes work is also important. Organisations are starting to put information about career options (eg different career routes) and career processes (eg how to plan your career or make a job move) on their intranet systems.

### 4.4.2 Access to career advice

A range of processes is being used to strengthen access to career advice:

- Better frameworks can be provided for manager-subordinate career discussions and the personal development plans (PDPs) that flow from these. Nationwide has adopted a simple, user-friendly structure for career plans and the dialogue that surrounds them.
- Self-help career planning tools assist employees to reflect on their skills and aspirations and shape their career plans, perhaps in advance of a discussion. Rolls-Royce, Nationwide and Lloyds TSB all have

comprehensive toolkits available to their employees. Many self-help books are also available and some are listed at the back of this report.

- Sources of personal advice other than the line manager are being provided. These sources include expert career counsellors in the HR function and HR call centres. Career coaches can also be developed and embedded in the business, as in the Lloyds TSB case study.
- The development of advice given remotely (via telephone) or electronically (eg by email) is developing rapidly and proving more attractive than one might imagine (Offer and Sampson, 1999).

What seems to be important in terms of advice is that there is at least one mechanism other than the immediate line manager for accessing career advice. The Lloyds TSB case study shows a combination of call centre, career coaches and self-help tools that provide both information and advice.

#### **4.4.3 Improved access to job opportunities**

Even with better advice, employees still need to be able to manage their own career moves. The quiet revolution in HR in the late 1990s was the move towards open internal job markets where vacancies are posted (now mostly electronically) and individuals can apply (Hirsh et al., 2000). This shift is valued by employees as long as most jobs really do find their way into the open system.

There are still challenges with some aspects of managerial behaviour, especially with managers who block their existing staff from moving on or who only fill jobs with staff they already know. Such behaviour can discriminate against individuals and groups of staff. Sometimes, HR guidelines on selection can prevent employees from moving into new types of work. An unfortunate catch-22 of modern career management is an insistence on

applicants having all the skills needed before they get the job. Therefore, a continuing challenge for organisations with open internal job markets is to ensure that developmental job moves remain possible, both for employees with further potential and those seeking a change of career direction.

#### **4.4.4 Informal career support**

It is risky to assume that formal HR processes dominate the career landscape. Informal access to information and advice and informal networking to get 'known' by people in other parts of the organisation are very important. HR professionals tend to regard these processes as evil and discriminatory. However, research by Hirsh et al. (2001) showed them to be both highly prevalent and particularly critical in enabling individuals to manage their own careers. Rather than squash the informal out of the system, we should be more explicit about the benefits of informal career advice. But two provisos are needed: we need to ensure that minority groups are not put at a disadvantage because of their exclusion from certain networks, and we also need to provide better training for all people in the organisation to improve the quality of informal career support. To give a recent example, doctors make very complex career choices, but have very little access to good quality career advice. The BMJ Careers case study (page 26) shows how electronic communication can put informal advice from peers in reach of all doctors.

#### **4.5 And what of career partnership?**

It is curious that in describing career processes, it remains easiest to make the crude distinction between processes for corporate career management on the one hand, and support for self-managed careers on the other. Do these processes and approaches meet in the middle to reflect the espoused strategy of career partnership?

## Case studies: 8–10

In reality, the processes for managing high potential employees are becoming less corporately controlled and more of a true partnership. Ideas for career options are often formulated by both the individual and the organisation (through succession planning and/or high potential schemes), and career moves are often negotiations between the individual and organisation representatives. It is also important to remember that high potential employees are some of the most proactive at managing their own careers and they frequently make extensive use of informal career support to facilitate their career development.

When we look at self-managed careers, the forms of support offered are still usually far short of an equal partnership as defined in Section 3. Information and advice help the individual, but do not amount to a real negotiation between the individual and the organisation that explicitly addresses each party's needs. In particular, it is very difficult for 'ordinary' employees to get the kind of developmental job moves routinely offered on career development programmes for 'special' groups.

One of the case study organisations, Rolls-Royce, extends a form of succession and development planning to a much larger population. This is carried out by groups of managers working together, and so gets beyond the views and influence of the single line manager. This process offers the potential for a career partnership with far more employees through more serious organisational engagement if there is strong feedback to, and dialogue with, the individuals concerned. However, such processes do require high commitment from managers to achieve potentially significant business benefits.

### CASE STUDY 8

#### **Lloyds TSB: Trained career coaches**

*Lloyds TSB has about 80,00 employees. The company strongly supports the idea of employees managing their own careers and learning, and provides the information and support to help them do this more effectively through their corporate university – the University for Lloyds TSB (UfLTSB). Many aspects of its Human Resources have moved into a 'shared services' model, with employees able to access career information and advice via intranet and internet websites, as well as an HR Call Centre. Support for career development has followed this strategy.*

*The UfLTSB's Centre for Career Management was launched in 2000. Employees can access a range of career information via this website, including information about different business units and the types of jobs they have. Employees can assess themselves against the competencies for different job roles, and use the Job Shop, which advertises internal vacancies. Employees can obtain a self-help career planning package via the HR Call Centre. It is made available on disk or as a workbook.*

*More personal and in-depth support is provided by a group of Career Coaches, who offer confidential 1:1 career advice to individuals referred to them by the HR Call Centre. They do this in addition to their 'day job', taking a few cases each month, contacting the individual by telephone initially, and then meeting them once or twice for career discussions if appropriate. There are currently about 115 career coaches, trained to a level recognised by the Institute of Career Guidance. Career coaches work in all parts of the Group and are not just HR people. Demand from people wanting to train as Career Coaches is high.*

*To enable Lloyds TSB to maintain its accreditation by the Guidance Accreditation Board and meet the national*

*Matrix Standard as a provider of career guidance, it provides ongoing development for both Career Coaches and the HR Call Centre's Career Information Advisors.*

*In 2003, Lloyds TSB's call centre took over 700 calls about career issues, with just over a third being referred to a Career Coach. Call centre staff have been trained to give career information and to know when to refer an individual for more expert help. The need for careful management of the interface between these two levels of career support has been a learning point, as has the need to maintain active marketing of all the career services available to staff.*

## **CASE STUDY 9**

### **BMJ Careers: The 'Advice Zone'**

*'BMJ Careers' is the section of the British Medical Journal that publishes medical job adverts. It is also the home of the Career Focus section, which each week publishes a number of short articles on aspects of medical careers.*

*In 2003, BMJ Careers launched the 'Advice Zone' as a web-based service to which users can submit their career questions. The Advice Zone aims to offer high-quality and accessible medical careers advice. Over time, it is hoped that the questions and answers will build up into a database of medical career advice.*

*A selection of queries that have not been asked before and that are likely to be interesting and relevant to other users are chosen for posting on the Advice Zone website. Other readers can respond to them immediately, but the questions are also sent to one of the Advice Zone's panel of 250 advisers for a reply. Responses are vetted and edited before they are posted. Advisers are also given feedback and their replies would not be posted if they were not judged to be good enough.*

*It takes up to a week for a question to be posted after it has*

*been submitted and another week before a reply from an adviser is posted. So far, about 75% of all questions submitted have been posted.*

*As well as submitting a question, users are able to browse existing questions and see what advice has been given. They can respond to questions with their own career tips and register as an adviser. About half the questions submitted have been from overseas doctors and there is a special section dealing with information about working in the UK.*

*Advisers were recruited initially from Career Focus contributors, but if people volunteer via the website to be an adviser, then they are asked to submit a CV and outline the reasons why they think they would be a good adviser before they are invited to join the panel.*

*The Advice Zone is not a confidential counselling service. Users are advised to use a false name if they want to submit a question that they would be sensitive about being identified as having asked. Neither does it offer the opportunity for an ongoing relationship; just a one-off answer from an adviser to a question.*

*The Advice Zone has been running for nearly a year, and so far over 1,300 questions have been submitted by doctors and medical students. Each week, a selection of questions and answers are also published in the BMJ Career Focus section.*

## **CASE STUDY 10**

### **Rolls-Royce: Development Cells and Skill Owners**

*Rolls-Royce plc operates in four global markets: civil aerospace, defence aerospace, marine and energy. The company employs around 36,000 people in 48 countries, of whom 22,000 are in the UK. Career development is seen as*

central to both skill deployment and employee development. Career paths take place in three dimensions: market-facing businesses, functions and geographical locations.

Line managers have a responsibility to be proactive in the career development of their staff. Managers work with each other on this agenda through a process called 'Development Cells'. Development Cells are regular forums through which the company manages leadership succession and individual career development. At a Development Cell meeting, leaders and their teams collectively review the potential and capability of their people against business needs. A cascaded network of Development Cells cover both business areas and functions, and in turn key Skill Groups within functions. The top-level development cell, led by the CEO, focuses on the corporate succession process and is linked with high-level business reviews. Development Cells at all levels examine skill needs and identify people who need a move or some particular development. What is unusual is that they drill this proactive development approach right down through the whole managerial and professional population. The aim is to establish a strongly developmental environment that is both business focused and interested in each individual.

There is a strong emphasis on training and development, encompassing leadership and business skills as well as technical expertise. Skill and career development within functions is strengthened by the activities of Company Skill Owners. In the engineering function, where Skill Owners are well established, 21 Skill Groups have been identified, each with a Skill Owner. These are the leading authority in their skill for the company globally. They are charged with being 'a driving force in the development of professionals', and are deeply involved in both skill development and career development from graduate recruitment up to the highest levels. Skill Owners are linked into relevant development cells,

where they work jointly with line managers.

Alongside these management-led review processes, individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for managing their careers. They are supported by the line, and by self-help career planning tools and an open internal job market. HR offers direct support to both employees and line managers. There is an obvious need to link the Development Cell discussions to the individual employees they cover. Managers have this responsibility. Some employees are proactive in this by, for example, booking discussions with their manager when they know a Cell meeting is coming up, and asking for feedback afterwards.

## 5. Career development roles and organisational capability

### 5.1 Who should employees talk to about their careers?

The issue of who does what in career development, which we will call 'roles', is both a strategic issue and part of process design. Roles cause enough confusion to be worth addressing in this separate section.

If individuals are told that the role of the organisation in career development is to provide support through information and advice, then the first question is: 'Who do I get that advice from?' In the richer 'partnership' deal, this question becomes: 'Who do I negotiate my career development with?' In the corporate career development deal, the question might be: 'Who will talk to me about what the organisation has in mind for my future?'

In all the various career deals there is unlikely to be just one person in the organisation who the individual should discuss their career with. As outlined in Section 4, there is always a set of underlying purposes that underpin career development and the trick is to find the right person (or people) who can deliver for a particular purpose in a particular context. In large and complex organisations, this is often a difficult task.

While conventional wisdom suggests that the line manager is the key person who can represent and negotiate for the organisation, in practice line managers are only good for some purposes, like giving feedback on job performance or identifying training and development needs for the current job. Their focus on current job performance and limited view of the organisation (unless they are very senior) often militates against them being very helpful on wider career issues.

So, who might individuals talk to about specific career matters?

- **Who to talk to about strengths and weaknesses?**

A good manager, or the manager's manager, who knows the individual well; people they have worked for or on projects with; close colleagues. Psychometric tests and exercises may be helpful in some cases.

- **Who to talk to about the organisation and future careers?**

Senior managers (including senior mentors), heads of function/profession and HR directors can often give an overview of the business, key trends, and the big picture of current and future career options.

- **Who to talk to for a fresh view on their career?**

People outside the business who are likely to have an unbiased perspective on them and their work. Good mentors can also challenge some of the assumptions people have about themselves and their capabilities, as can trained career counsellors or career coaches.

- **Who to talk to about how to make possible job moves?**

Other managers, colleagues, fellow participants at career workshops or development centres, are often good sources of information and may share their own experiences of making job moves.

- **Who to talk to about skill development?** The line manager, HR managers, training advisers, senior managers – especially if they are role models; coaches, mentors, or heads of function/profession.

As we have seen, some groups (graduates, senior specialists, executives and high-fliers) often have their careers managed more centrally by business leaders, functional heads or central HR teams. Corporate career development is often a matter of close liaison between HR and senior executives. Various committees of executives are normally the focal point for individual career plans arising out of succession planning. Extra roles can appear, for example formal mentors or coaches. At PricewaterhouseCoopers, young accountants have a 'counselling manager' who advises them on training and

development issues, as well as being responsible for reviewing their performance.

High potential employees are likely to be proactive in managing their own careers, and they need to work closely with those who are expected to plan their careers, and broker job moves and development opportunities. Making sure that those people who provide this additional career support take account of individual as well as business needs is just as important for these 'special' groups as for the rest of the workforce.

### **5.2 Skilling the helpers – building capability**

Linked to the issue of who to talk to is that of whether the people who an individual might talk to have the capability (both knowledge and willingness) to provide support or negotiate on the organisation's behalf. Just as the individual needs guidance on who to talk to about different issues, so it is the responsibility of HR (on the organisation's behalf) to make sure that each of these players is not only capable of, but supported in their role.

This is likely to require some specific training for both employees and managers. The Lloyds TSB case shows the importance of training HR call centre staff as well as designated Career Coaches. The Guidance Council developed a national standard – the Matrix Quality Standard – for career information, advice and guidance services, including those offered by employers. The Standard is now managed by the Employment NTO and, to date, the Guidance Accreditation Board has accredited 25 private sector employers against the Matrix Standard.

At Marks and Spencer (page 30), the HR function will be helping line managers to take on a fuller role in giving career support. HR professionals need their capability

enhanced so that they can lead and support this change.

### **5.3 Building links between different sources of support**

Managers and employees need to be aware that support for career development is provided through a network; whoever you start with should know who to refer you on to for further information or advice.

Increasingly, career support is provided electronically via company intranets or in learning resource centres. This is probably the best way to provide up-to-date information, but is also a way of providing access to other self-help career materials.

In reality, therefore, sources of career support can be grouped into four categories:

1. Line and senior managers – often the first port of call.
2. HR and specialist advisers (including coaches and mentors), along with career events like workshops and development centres.
3. Information and related self-help materials, provided either electronically or via learning resource centres.
4. Everyone else in the organisation – potential sources of informal information and advice.

Making sure that everyone in the organisation understands how these four types of role for providing career support complement each other and fit together is one of the key HR responsibilities. HR also needs to facilitate the processes by which groups of managers can operate together to develop the careers of their staff. Career development is better thought of as a collective management responsibility than one loaded on the immediate boss alone.

## Case study: 11

### **CASE STUDY 11** **Marks and Spencer:** **Strengthening the capability of HR**

*In 1998, an independent, confidential career centre was set up by Marks and Spencer in response to staff feedback that: 'It was easier to get a job externally than internally.' This area became known and branded as the 'Vista Centre'. It was part of HR, but independent of the HR functions of each business area. At the Vista Centre staff could access confidential support from a trained adviser, internal vacancy boards, a library of career-related materials, outplacement support and group sessions on topics such as CV writing and interview techniques.*

*This approach, whilst seen as successful, was felt to distance career support from local line managers and HR Business Partners. There was some concern in the HR community that this would allow line managers to abdicate their responsibility for career development. Other important career processes, for example succession planning, were devolved to business areas and it was felt that devolution of career coaching would be better aligned with these processes. Therefore, in June 2003 career support for employees was devolved to business areas.*

*During this transition, two issues arose. First, line managers were not yet ready to take on a much stronger role in giving career support so local HR teams would need to offer direct career support to individuals and, simultaneously, to support and develop line managers. Second, the people in HR themselves had a credibility gap in taking on this new role, having had little specific expertise in career counselling.*

*A training programme to upskill HR people as career coaches has therefore been implemented. It covers career-coaching skills, the use of a self-help, computer-based package (Corporate Horizons) and selected psychometric tools. Forty-*

*five HR people have been trained so far and more training days are planned. The term 'career coaching' is being used under a wider umbrella of several distinct types of coaching role, including executive coaching and performance coaching.*

*Local career support from HR and the line will be complemented by a corporate intranet career site, available to 67,000 employees. Devolved career advice can narrow the career options for staff, and M&S hope to avoid this through their open vacancy system and active networking between the local HR teams.*

#### 5.4 The role of HR

HR has a number of key roles in career development:

- working with business leaders to design career development strategies and processes, and then communicating these to all employees
- providing general information on jobs and careers in the organisation, and developing and deploying self-help resources for employees
- facilitating and handling data in collective corporate career processes, such as succession planning
- project management, support for career development schemes and direct dialogue with scheme participants and special populations. This role is often taken by the management development director or leadership development team
- ensuring managers have the skills needed for their critical role in delivering career development.

There are also two, more contentious points about HR's role:

1. Employees and managers expect HR to give informed, trustworthy and skilful career advice. This expectation is not unreasonable. All HR professionals should have a good understanding of career development (lamentably lacking at present) and each large organisation should have a few experts. However, this is not a simple, bolt on role for someone in HR to assume; it requires interest and expertise.
2. At the centre of most large organisations, there is someone – usually the management development director or equivalent – who has clear responsibility for the career development of senior managers and high potential employees. There is rarely someone with a clear remit for a career development strategy and policy covering all employees. But there should be. Career development is not an area where devolved policy-making works effectively as, by definition, careers stretch

across internal boundaries. Most of the case studies that have made progress in career development have had one person at the corporate centre in HR or employee development with this as their clear job.

## 6. Facing the future

### 6.1 Improving practice is an achievable goal

As this paper has outlined, career development practice in many large organisations is still relatively muddled and consequently weak. But things are on the move. The case study examples show the benefits of adopting a clearer and more positive approach. They also show that comparatively small amounts of concentrated attention can vastly improve career development support in organisations.

Improving practice is both about what you do (ie the content of strategy and the design of processes) and how you do it (ie the approach you take to managing this form of organisational change).

#### 6.1.1 Top tips for improving career development

- Start with an audit of the processes you already use for managing careers, and an analysis of business needs for career development and your employees' key career issues.
- Work with business leaders to commit the organisation to a realistic and positive message for all staff about career development. Explain the deal – what employees have to do and what you offer them.
- Provide a simple explanation of the types of work in the organisation and the broad career paths available.
- Give one, fairly senior, person at the corporate centre the clear responsibility for career development strategy, and the development of career support for all staff. They should work closely with business leaders and a range of employees.
- Be clear and realistic about the line manager's role in career development and train all managers for it. Ensure they all understand the processes they are being asked to use. Help managers work collectively on the career issues of their staff.
- Provide some form of off-line career advice on request for all employees and provide more in-depth training for those taking more expert roles, eg as career advisers, career workshop facilitators, career coaches or mentors.
- Empower and encourage employees to seek informal career advice from anyone they feel can help. Ask senior managers to role model giving informal career support, and try leaving the HR office door open.
- Ensure opportunities – through normal job filling or internal secondments – for employees who are seeking to make lateral moves into work they have not done before, but which they can learn quickly.
- Be aware that some groups of employees (eg women returners, part-timers, minority ethnic groups) are often disadvantaged in internal labour markets just as they are in the external labour market. Processes need to be designed to ensure that these groups can progress their careers alongside their work colleagues.
- If you identify people for corporate career development through succession plans or development schemes, make sure this process is rigorous, ensure they get the career experience you identify for them and track their careers.
- Pick a small number of career development processes and check they are well-balanced across the five underlying purposes: employee skills/feedback; business needs/career options; advice and planning; job movement and experience; and skill development. Aim to implement a few things well rather than attempt too many interventions.
- Stick with it. Clarify an approach that fits your business, communicate it relentlessly and allow it to adjust and evolve, but don't give it less than five years to work.

## 6.2 Thorny issues

Some key challenges will be about implementing things we can already see as likely:

- **Sustaining a segmented career strategy.** How successful will organisations be in supporting self-managed careers for the majority of employees alongside more corporately-managed careers for selected groups? This combination is probably a rational response to the career context and seems unlikely to go away, but different career deals for different workforce groups present challenges of both communication and implementation (Viney et al., 1997). In practical terms, operating managed job moves for the few in an open, internal job market for the many is a tricky business.
- **Being a reliable career partner.** Organisations seeking to deliver higher productivity through greater organisational commitment will be drawn towards stronger career partnerships with their employees. But how will organisations learn to make and keep career promises, even over short periods of time, when line management relationships are often so frail and short-lived? Who exactly can individuals 'strike their career deal' with?
- **Remote career advice.** The next few years will see organisations learning how to make the best use of remote electronic and telephone career support alongside face-to-face career advice. Information provided inside organisations will be competing with huge amounts of electronic information from outside – most of it pitched at attracting employees to work for someone else.
- **Upskilling career support.** New roles for providing career advice and guidance inside employing organisations are emerging, with different purposes and varying skill requirements. Better training is clearly needed for those in such roles, but will the full paraphernalia of new professional bodies, standards,

qualifications and accreditation help or stifle the development of the capability to offer better career support? Will public policy ever subsidise the cost of in-depth career guidance for employed adults?

## 6.3 Future challenges

As raised in Section 2, changes in business, demography and social attitudes will raise more fundamental challenges for managing careers in organisations:

- **Managing mobility** as the geographical movement of work to people and people to work will increase. The freer flow of people internationally and increasing globalisation of large companies will present individuals and employers with new opportunities, but also many challenges, especially as large organisations reach for global rather than colonial career models (Trompenaars, 1993). It seems likely that organisational careers will contain varying periods of geographical mobility rather than the 'all or nothing' mobility commitments that organisations have often asked for in the past.
- **Work-life balance** is unlikely to go away as a tension. In many organisations, it is possible to access more flexible working patterns, but only if you sacrifice career ambition. Tackling the time demands of senior roles is long overdue (Kodz et al., 2002).
- **The careers of older people** seem likely to present both the biggest challenges and biggest opportunities (Mockler, 2002). The unspoken career deal for senior people in many large organisations is that you work unreasonably hard, but get out in your 50s with a good pension, and then 'get a life'. Demographics, skill shortages and the state of pension funds will see this deal dying away for all but the highest-paid. Large organisations have a huge opportunity to pace careers better, redesign jobs and offer flexible working options to older workers as a means of both retaining and developing their skills.

- **Diversity** is the essential challenge of the future. This is not just in conventional terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, social background, religion, sexual orientation, etc. The workforce will also be increasingly diverse in terms of educational and career experiences, attitudes and aspirations. Rigid career assumptions about what kinds of people have access to what types of job and at what ages are not sustainable.

An important part of the response to these changes is around developing more flexible career and employment opportunities. Employers would gain enormously in terms of employee commitment and also retain scarce skills from making flexible working arrangements more widely available. Flexibility includes time and place of work and a better work-life balance (eg flexitime, working from home, annual hours, etc) but also flexibility in mobility, the pace of career progression and alternative career paths.

This flexible career management is all about continuously adjusting the work that employees undertake over time to meet changing business and individual needs. It is in marked contrast to the UK's much-discussed 'flexible labour market' that relies on hiring and firing to resource changing business needs. Such flexibility may be crucial in some circumstances, but can also be an inefficient and lazy way of deploying the workforce's skills and talents.

If diversity and flexibility are the requirements of future careers, then the organisations that can really respond to the varying needs of each employee over time will attract and retain the best people, and also get the best from them. Positive career development will be about this ability to respond to what each individual can offer, and employee commitment will be the prize for organisations that rise to this challenge.

## Annex 1: Audit your organisation's career fitness

If, as we hope, this paper inspires you to improve career development in your organisation, you may benefit from some early self-assessment. The exercise below can be seen as light hearted quiz, but can also form the basis of more ambitious audit exercises to find out how career development is experienced by managers and staff.

Ask the HR director and another senior manager to say aloud the statements and complete them by 'filling in the dots'. Then ask a couple of fairly junior members of staff to have a go, too.

You don't need a fancy scoring system to see if your approach to careers is clear, well understood and part of normal working life. Areas of weakness are revealed by blank looks or nervous laughter (in the case of senior people) or excessively loud laughter (in the case of more junior people)!

1. Our organisation has a clear and positive corporate message on career development for all staff, which explains what we give as well as what we expect staff to do. Our message is that ...
2. The broad career paths, or types of career, in the organisation are described to employees in terms of ...
3. Our managers are clear what their role is in relation to the career development of their own staff and have the skills, knowledge and confidence to carry out this role. Their role is to ...
4. If our staff need to talk to someone other than their manager about their career, they can approach anyone informally. If they need more in-depth career advice they can talk to ...
5. The promotion process is clear and fair. It ensures merit and guards against discrimination by ...
6. Our employees can make a sideways move to another department or work area. They can do this by ...
7. Our employees are helped to develop their skills for the

future as well as for their current jobs by ...

8. It is important to know that we are actively developing a healthy supply of future business leaders and giving them the right career experiences. Our current leaders do this by ...

9. Our approach to career development fits our particular business needs, the attitudes and preferences of our employees, and our general approach to managing people. It feels it fits us because ...

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### Websites relevant to career management

Many employers, professional bodies and educational institutions can be found on the web. Some general sites with career information include:

Graduate careers information: [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

Educational information: [www.learnirect.co.uk](http://www.learnirect.co.uk)

General career planning materials:

[www.jobhuntersbible.com](http://www.jobhuntersbible.com) and [www.worklife.com.au](http://www.worklife.com.au)

Oxford Psychologists Press distributes a number of career tests: [www.opp.co.uk](http://www.opp.co.uk)

Matrix Standard for career guidance:

[www.matrix-quality-standard.com](http://www.matrix-quality-standard.com)

### Sources of books and research reports:

BPS (British Psychological Society) for books on careers and assessment: [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)

The Career Innovation Group: [www.careerinnovation.com](http://www.careerinnovation.com)

CIPD: [www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)

CRAC (Careers Research and Advisory centre) and its research arm NICEC (National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling): [www.crac.org.uk](http://www.crac.org.uk)

Institute for Employment Studies:

[www.employment-studies.co.uk](http://www.employment-studies.co.uk)

The Guidance Council: [www.guidancecouncil.com](http://www.guidancecouncil.com)



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