Maps, ladders, lattices and pipelines: Staffing your business, for tomorrow

Business isn’t static. The talent we need today is often not the same we’ll need to lead us through tomorrow. As our business model changes, so will the roles required to support those operations. The challenge for an organization, then, is to develop internal talent that will still be relevant in that future business world.

Why should you develop employees with transferrable career sets? It’s not that anyone wants employees to transfer out of their organization (of course not!). But we do want to develop employees with the skills necessary for future business goals. This is the idea behind talent planning—the topic of this Blue Paper® and podcast. Let’s dive right in.

Talent planning means evaluating the skills the company has today against what the organization is going to need tomorrow. It means figuring out what roles will be critical to the organization’s success and how to foster that kind of dynamic talent from within. For some organizations, the way to do that is through career mapping.

Career maps

The term “career mapping” means different things to different people. For many, it’s how individuals plan their professional future. To HR folks, however, the idea of career mapping is a much more formal system to develop company staff.

Career maps show employees how they might advance within the organization. Generally speaking, they outline job families and the ladders of advancement within and between those families. They provide a roadmap, so to speak, from entry through executive levels.

What your organization’s career map looks like depends largely on how your organization works. Imagine a structured retail environment like Starbucks®, for example. Employees have clear-cut jobs like barista, store manager, district manager. They know what they need to do to get from one level to the next.

The same holds true in some corporate environments. At Gordon Advisors, P.C., a CPA firm based in Troy, Mich., for example, employees use career maps to
progress through well-defined levels of development such as junior, intermediate, senior management and partner.¹

In these organizations, the career mapping process outlines levels of advancement, along with the training, skills and accomplishments required to achieve each level. Let’s imagine it in simple terms: Let’s say that in order to move from waitress to hostess, you might need a minimum of one year of service plus five customer surveys at a certain rating or better. To move into an assistant manager role, you might also need bartending experience. And to become manager in our hypothetical restaurant, you might also need two courses in hospitality management.

In other words, career maps can create clear-cut criteria for career development, shifting responsibility from the firm to the individual. No more complaints that someone didn’t know how to succeed and no more fuzzy, subjective promotion decisions!

“Each individual has a clear understanding of what it will take to get to the next level of opportunity,” says Sharon O’Connor, founder and director of Independence Counseling. “By following these criteria, you’ll know where you’re going and you can develop a timetable for your career development.”²

But even when the organization isn’t structured around clear hierarchal lines, career mapping can illustrate the more organic paths to growth within the organization. In some companies career maps are simply a way to say, “This is how so-and-so got to the top, and you can too.”

Career mapping: Pie charts and ladders

One way to start career mapping is to calculate the opportunities and the areas of highest need in the organization. As Dr. Caela Farren, CEO of MasteryWorks®, a career development company, explains it, that begins with identifying the professions that operate within your organization. Next, organize that list into core and secondary professions. Finally, determine what percentage of people

comprise each profession in your organization. When you’re done, it should look a little something like this pie chart:

![Pie Chart Example](image)

This is the approach, and the pie chart, that the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) took when developing its career mapping initiative which rolled out in early 2011. The DLA developed a list of 15 occupations critical to its mission. These 15 occupations are represented in the chart by showing the relative size of each occupation. For example, “contracting” is by far the largest piece of the pie at 34 percent, followed by “inventory management” at 13 percent, “general supply” at 11 percent, and “supply program management” at nine percent.³

The next step is to identify what education and skill sets—or “core competencies”—are required for each profession. This might include formal education, developmental experiences like on-the-job learning, and profession-specific skill sets or knowledge. These competencies might also include “soft skills” such as being detail-oriented, conflict management or effective mentoring.⁴

At the DLA, the human resources team is developing a career mapping pyramid, seen below, for each of its 15 core occupations. Each pyramid provides a graphic representation of the skills employees will need to reach executive level in each profession. The pyramid contains development levels and four focus areas: job

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functions, technical competencies, leadership competencies and education and training.

As the DLA moves through its career mapping process, the organization will provide additional tools, such as knowledge and experience checklists, to help employees plan their own career advancement.

Mapping company jobs this way provides management with a clear picture of organizational needs and gives individual careerists a view of organizational opportunities. “Career mapping validates the agency’s commitment to its employees’ professional development and provides the employees with an opportunity to partner in their development” says Pam Latker, chief of career management at DLA Training.⁵

Career mapping: Ladders or cul-de-sacs

Career mappings looks similar ... but different ... at KBR, a global engineering and construction firm. Like the DLA, KBR is also in the early stages of its career mapping strategy.

“Our goal is to show employees they can take the ladder of success,” says Amber Lagow, HR specialist. “You can go from being a level 10 to a level 70 if you so choose.”

But KBR is placing strong emphasis on the idea that employees don’t have to go up a ladder to reach executive status. “If you wanted to get to know the organization more fully, then you can go from HR to communication, to legal,” Lagow says. “You can take the ladder up or you can take the cul-de-sac and get a well-rounded idea of the company and develop yourself that way.”

KBR’s CEO is a driving force behind the initiative and one of the strongest proponents for developing an organizational-wide experience. He’s even reorganized group presidents—people who have led one specific department for years—and placed them in charge of different areas.

“It’s really emphasizing the idea that this is coming from the top-down,” Lagow says.

Employees have the option of switching departments at any level or taking the technical track and working their way up. But is switching latterly really an option for employees once they’ve reached a certain career stage? Yes and no, says Lagow.

“Ideally we would get professionals at a level 20 or 30, not at a management stage, but it has happened,” she says. “Our assistant vice president of legal jumped over to VP of business objectives. Everyone is trying to get a well-rounded experience.”

KBR isn’t using the pie charts and pyramid diagrams in place at the DLA, but they are creating visual maps nonetheless. They’re using ARIS®, an Oracle® business process analysis product to matrix and chart organizational opportunities. Their core professions include 16 groups such as HR, legal, engineering and physical sciences. From there, those groups are broken into job families. The career maps illustrate what a career might look like if you stay in one job family. Or, it can show related job families.

KBR has revamped its talent development website, so employees can get a better understanding of what talent development means at KBR, the company’s workforce analysis, and what Lagow calls “career navigation” or the potential ladders and circles to management.
“We allow employees to develop themselves and give them tools to speak with their managers on how they think they can develop,” Lagow says. “That way, employees can more readily understand the options for growing up and growing laterally.”

Lattice not ladder

Generally speaking, the career mapping concept is based on the idea of career ladders—that is, employees move up within an organization based on progressive levels of contribution. But in the late 1990s, financial advisory firm Deloitte asked us to think of career progression in different terms—not a ladder, but a lattice.

When moving along a lattice, an employee can move in many directions but is not limited to upward or downward progress. Cathy Benko, vice chairman and chief talent officer for Deloitte described the career lattice this way: “While a so-called plateau or lateral move, or a move downward, was once viewed as the end of the line, today’s employees are more apt to reach a comfortable level of responsibility and compensation and stay there for a while to balance work and life demands. Later, many resume their upward climb—or not.”

Deloitte calls its talent program “mass career customization.” (Benko even co-authored a book on the concept.) The company estimates approximately 10 percent of its employees are ramping up or down at any given time.

Mass career customization is based on Deloitte's view that the career path for today's knowledge workers is more like waves on chart, with increasing and decreasing levels of engagement over time.

“In the real world, lattices are living platforms for growth, with upward momentum visible along many paths,” writes Benko. “The corporate lattice model of career progression allows for multiple paths upward taking into account the changing needs of both the individual and the organization across various intervals of time.”

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At Deloitte, mass career customization is not so much of a career map, but a corporate acknowledgement that employees should have the opportunity to dial back their careers for a while without completely stepping out of the organization or damaging future growth opportunities.

Why map, why now?

Even though the country is recovering from a recession, that hasn’t stopped organizations like the DLA and KBR from focusing on talent development. While national unemployment was still hovering around nine percent at the end of 2011, many companies report a shortage of skilled workers like scientists and engineers. That’s why talent strategies remain critical, even in an economic downturn.

“Our workforce is aging,” says Lagow. “We have a lot of people coming up on retirement. Ideally what we want to do is develop our internal employees so we can use succession planning to move them up within the organization. That way, we’re only bringing in the new people we absolutely need.”

Of course the thing about any employee development program is that it’s not just about filling critical positions, it’s about retention too. Employees will stay longer at an organization that offers career advancement and learning opportunities. People want a chance to grow!

Pam Latker is the division chief of career management with DLA Training. She recognizes that career mapping is more than a talent development tool. She believes the system will help with recruiting as well.

“It helps folks to see the opportunities in DLA as a whole to map out their career and where they may want to go in the future,” Latker says. “But it’s also a way for us to market DLA in general, to say, ‘Look at all the opportunities that exist in DLA, our career fields, and how we develop and invest in our workforce.’”

Getting started with talent planning

When your company is in growth mode, staffing issues can be a big stumbling block to progress. Whatever it is your company makes, sells, or services, you need people just to meet day-to-day production demands. But more importantly, you need innovators who can create new opportunities and manage change.

High performing talent is still in top demand, and your company has two ways of securing these critical workers: Recruit them away from other organizations or develop them internally.

Whether you decide to engage in a formal career mapping initiative or some other talent development program, the fundamental steps are the same:

**Step one: Identify pivotal roles**
What positions are critical to the company’s success? Yes, we know everyone is important, but for the purpose of this exercise, think about where your company wants to go in the future. What departments will lead that charge? Where do you need the real dynamo people who will be out front making things happen?

**Step two: Develop a strategy to get that talent**
Once you know what kind of talent you need, ask yourself, where are those people currently working? You might come up with a geographic answer or an industry answer, or something as specific as a shortlist of companies rich with exactly that kind of talent.

Now ask yourself what you’ll need to be attractive to those in-demand professionals. Salary is important, but it’s not always the top consideration. Consider whether the job could be done remotely, for example. If you’re willing to hire someone who lives across the country, you’ll have a wider talent pool from which to recruit.

Maybe you want to attract a workforce accustomed to modern office environments or one that expects flexible work hours. With enough time to plan, you can implement the types of benefits that appeal to your target employee group. Perhaps that means telecommuting infrastructure, a satellite office, or a redesign of corporate offices.

As the same time you’re investigating recruitment strategies, look for opportunities to develop talent internally. What are the ideal skills and
experiences you’d want that talent to have? Is anyone close enough to that skill set that you could develop them in the time required for implementation?

**Step three: Create an internal development plan**

Even if you’ll need to recruit staff in the short-term, an employee development program will create leadership potential for the future. If the technical career mapping process used at KBR or the DLA seems like a poor fit for your organization, consider more informal means of sharing career maps.

You might have senior leaders to chart their own career paths. Ask these leaders to share their career progression stories during a series of lunch meetings. Employees will learn that there are different ways to move up within an organization. Plus, with first-hand access to leadership, they can find out what skills executives are looking for in tomorrow's company leaders.

Make leadership career maps accessible on the corporate intranet or in the company training library. These kind of resources can help guide employees as they think about their own career and discuss progression with their managers.

And remember, any employee development process needs to remain fluid, so you can respond to changing business needs. A lot can happen in five years, so plan to revisit your career maps regularly.

**Step four: Provide resources for learning**

Of course, career maps are only part of an employee development initiative. Telling employees you want them to learn and grow within the organization won’t mean much unless you provide access to training and internal corporate networking opportunities.

At KBR, networking is a big part of employee development. The company has an organization called Impact, designed for employees with fewer than seven years of experience. Impact provides opportunities for networking and education. Younger employees learn the importance of showing initiative and get pointers on how to talk with their managers about their career goals.

“A lot of our VPs are part of Impact,” Lagow says. “They know how important it is to develop the younger group.”

At online retailer Zappos®, employee development is part of the company’s core values, one of which is “Pursue Growth and Learning.” At Zappos, staff development is referred to as “building the pipeline.” Not much for recruiting
outside talent, the company hires most of its people at entry level positions. The ideal vision is that every employee will have an opportunity to grow with the company and become a senior leader in five to seven years.

To make that happen, the company’s Pipeline Team is in charge of all things “training.” Every new employee goes through an initial four-week program that teaches the Zappos culture. After that, employees have the option to take advantage of individual department training programs or company-wide classes like merchandising, warehouse operations, communication and Zappos history. Employees are always encouraged to explore business functions outside their core area.

“At Zappos, we think it’s important for employees to grow both personally and professionally,” writes CEO Tony Hsieh in his book “Delivering Happiness.”

“It’s important to constantly challenge and stretch yourself and not be stuck in a job where you don’t feel like you are growing or learning.”

The company is so committed to staff development that it’s instituted an 80/20 rule. Employees spend 80 percent of their work time doing the actual work they were hired to do. The other 20 percent they use for education and rejuvenation—whether that’s taking a Zappos class, working out or using a nap room!

Resources
Think career mapping is right for your organization?

Plenty of resources exist to help your business or organization get started by exploring the concept further. You could contact career mapping consultants like, MasteryWorks or HRCatalyst or you could also start by looking for human resource consultants in your area and ask if they have any experience in career mapping. You might even contact a local university. Some faculty take on consulting projects or they might be willing to make your career mapping initiative a class project.

If you want to start small and have a limited budget, look to LinkedIn™ for help. Make an organized push to get everyone in the organization on LinkedIn, particularly top management. Employees will be able to browse through

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Talent planning means helping employees develop skills that will be applicable to a broader body of work. For some employees that will mean focusing on a specific job title with applicability across the organization. Or others, it might mean a more holistic set of skills.

Either way it’s about helping the company stay relevant in a dynamic economy. It’s about developing talent that will, in turn, help the organization develop.

Whether you do that through maps, ladders, lattices or pipelines is up to you … as long as there’s a clear vision and commitment to growth illuminating the way.