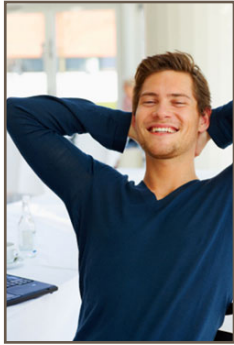




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Managing Employee Career Development in the 21st Century

[By Surajit Sen Sharma]

Career patterns for individual employees are changing. “Research suggests that the traditional linear career path in which one enters an organization near the bottom, works in the same organization for many years, and gradually and predictably moves up, retiring from a fairly high-level position in the same organization, may become the exception rather than the rule over the next few decades.”¹

Understanding emerging trends in employee career patterns is essential because without knowing about the latest career trends, it is impossible to assess individual career objectives and the career-related stress employees experience.

Emerging Changes in Employer Organizational Structure and Attitudes

Over the past few decades, a number of factors have compelled organizations to reorganize themselves. Some of these factors are:

- a changing economic environment
- changing technology
- increased competition
- a surplus of workers from the baby-boomer generation
- rising labor costs

In response to these factors, organizations have often restructured, downsized, or right-sized themselves by:

- reducing their numbers of permanent, full-time employees
- stepping up hiring of temporary workers

- starting to outsource work
- increasing opportunities for part-time employment
- discarding the pyramid structure in favor of flatter organizational structures, which has led them to reduce their numbers of entry-level and middle-level managers

In general, the employer’s attitude toward employees has shifted. Rather than expecting to provide lifelong employment in return for reliable service, the employer promises job security only as long as the individual employee’s contribution is necessary to the business’s success.

Organizational restructuring and massive layoffs have destroyed employee faith in the employer as a source of long-term security. Additionally, the reduction of opportunities for vertical advancement within “flattened” organizations and increased competition have forced the modern-day employee to become more versatile and develop alternatives to the outdated linear career model.

The Three New Career Paths

For enlightened employees in the 21st century, the definition of career success has

changed to include career objectives other than prestige and wealth. Employees now prioritize more than ever things like skill development, self-satisfaction, work-life balance, and self-actualization. The result is that in today’s world, instead of only following the linear-path model for career success, employees have accepted three more career-path models. These include:

1. The Expert Career Path: This career path rewards the development of skills in a specific field of expertise without making it necessary to move upward into management levels. Posts without managerial responsibilities that include hierarchies of designations (trainee, associate, junior, senior, etc.) have become common in organizations that employ knowledge-based workers and have changed core, “trusted” workforces into higher-skilled, transitory workforces.

2. The Spiral Career Path: The spiral career path allows the employee to make a series of lateral moves between different functional areas within the same organization. It allows people in human resource jobs to retain talent by continuously challenging employees with new tasks and broadening their experience while at the same time depriving them of swift hierarchical progress.



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3. The Transitory Career Path: The hallmark of the modern-day employee, the transitory career path usually evolves in a way that allows the employee to avoid depending on any single organization. The employee on the transitory career path usually builds

and maintains a portfolio of competencies that allow him or her to respond quickly to changes in the job market. The employee moves in and out of organizations and occupations in search of better jobs, building up an arsenal of skills in the process. Such

employees rarely rely on formal employer-provided career planning; instead, they manage their own careers.

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