

Career architecture – building blocks to effective talent management

A dynamic business environment, technological advancements, changing workforce aspirations and attitudes, all have significant consequences not just for businesses but for the talent market as well. Traditional approaches to career progression and movement are fast falling out of step with the changing needs of the talent market. In the Indian context, career architecture is a loosely defined concept. More often than not, there are no clear interlinkages established between various career architecture programmes and other HR processes. Any career management framework has to be driven by some key business objective. Across organisations, one of the key business drivers behind developing a career architecture is to provide employees with a consistent framework that supports career development and a clear understanding of the career path for the current and future roles.

Careers are no more just about upward growth or vertical shifts but also constitute lateral or diagonal moves, requiring organisations to have more meaningful conversations with their employees about how to optimise their talents.

The case for developing the right career architecture

Multiple issues like skills, competencies, progression or promotion expectations, salary changes etc. all come together when we discuss career. Employees expect growth in skill level, enhanced job responsibilities, progression in the organisation hierarchy and salary growth when they think of career – these factors, either individually or in combination, should be present for employees to feel progression in their career. Today, many employees want to opt for jobs within their organisation, either through lateral or vertical moves, or by being offered an opportunity to acquire new skills. “Career

advancement” opportunities have consistently been cited among the top 3 drivers of attraction and retention by both employees and employers in India, according to multiple Willis Towers Watson studies conducted over the last few years.

Employers grapple with organisation structure change, emerging skills, workforce efficiency and costs and, overall, an inability to provide career development opportunities. As consumer preferences are changing, business models are changing leading to a shift in the underlying talent model. The old ways of adding to the company’s talent pool are no longer working, pushing employers to take a closer look at their existing workforce.

Given this context, it is becoming essential for organisations to develop a career architecture to enhance clarity and transparency. Career architecture provides a consistent framework portraying the career paths for both current and future employees, ultimately helping with talent retention and development and building a strong Employee Value Proposition (EVP). Although employers do acknowledge this, they fall short in ‘walking the talk’. There is more that organisations need to do to transform this knowledge into actions.

Communicating career opportunities through effective tools

Latest Willis Towers Watson research indicates that only 36% companies in India agree to have developed effective communication tools for career management of their employees.

While 62% of the surveyed employers have an articulated career management philosophy, companies are not employing the right tools to communicate the skills and competencies employees require to grow. Among the employers

who do conduct career management programmes for their employees, only 47% of them monitor their effectiveness.

Also, there lies huge opportunity for organisations to define and showcase available career paths, especially lateral career paths to their employees. Compared to 76% of the companies that have defined vertical career paths, only 51% have defined lateral career paths.

Whose accountability is to manage careers?

Recent Willis Towers Watson research into career trends indicates that over 1/3rd employees in India feel they should take ownership of their own careers, while 31% feel that managers should guide employees' careers and 30% believe it is joint-ownership of both employees and managers.

On the other hand, only 24% employers feel that employees should take ownership of their own careers, while a majority 68% believe it is joint-ownership of both employees and managers, and merely 9% think that managers should guide employees' careers.

Also, majority of employees give their employers credit for providing useful career planning tools/resources – 63%; and opportunities such as promotions to advance in career – 61%.

Globally, employers are slowly enabling employees to take ownership of their own career as against the earlier predominant model of employee-manager joint ownership. It would help employers in India to take note of this trend and design their career architecture around it.

Employers are facing challenges in implementing career programmes

Employers face many pain points in developing and delivering effective career management programmes owing to several factors. These factors include poorly defined career levels as only 56% employers report that their organisations have defined career levels in place, a noticeable improvement over 48% reported in 2014.

Also, only 48% of employers say that their managers are effective at conducting career development

discussions as part of employees' performance management process, against 44% reported in 2014.

In addition, just a little over half the employers (52%) say their companies make effective use of technology to deliver programmes to help employees advance in their careers, an 8% improvement compared to 2014. Merely 47% of the employers say their organisations monitor the effectiveness of their career management programmes, a meagre 1% upgrade from 2014.

These challenges are further aggravated by not having consistent architecture in place. For instance, only 40% employers have consistent job architectures and merely 39% have defined consistent job levels and career framework.

Building manager capability also plays an essential role in effective career conversations. So while 52% (44% in 2014) organisations say they provide their managers with career management training and tools in the form of talking points or discussion guides, only 48% (41% in 2014) employees rate their managers as effective in holding career development discussions. This disconnect suggests that perhaps organisations are providing managers with the bare minimum tools, but not giving them all the training and skill building required to develop their capability to have effective conversations.

Developing infrastructure around competencies for career management

Competencies are building blocks for career programmes. From a framework perspective, around 65% employers have all the competencies in place, which are - Organisation-wide Core Competencies, Leadership Competencies, Functional Competencies and Scaled Competencies.

However, only 47% employers have their 360 degree assessments aligned with behaviours outlined in their competency model. When it comes to the scaling of competencies, the percentage drops, and when it comes to using them in 360 degrees assessment, it declines even further. Employers need to make both these aspects a part of the competency framework. Furthermore, when it

comes to application, employers still have some ground to cover.

Additionally, several components of competency development programmes that employers believe to be very effective are not actually so. For instance, 71% employers make university executive education part of their programmes, especially for the senior employees, which in reality do not give them the desired results.

Conclusion

For organisations to design an employee's career better, they should not only have a ladder-based approach for career advancements, but rather a 'jungle-gym approach' that also focuses on lateral growth. Organisations must also take steps to educate employees about the multiplicity of experiences that will work in their benefit. Lateral moves are often seen as a dead-end solution by the employers for employees who feel stagnated, while on the contrary, employees with an expand skill-set augur well for organisations at a time that demands both adaptability and agility.

It has also become increasingly important for employers to look into the aspirations of individual employees and basis that, build a career fabric that is stitched together with the competencies. Such an approach can help organisations effectively managing their talent in the long run.

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