

# PROGRESSION PATTERNS FOR CAREER LADDER TO CAREER LATTICE

**Rashi Mahato**

*Regional HR Manager, Tricon Energy*

**Abstract:** Talent management represent an organization's effort to attract, develop and retain skilled and valuable employees. The goal is to have people with capabilities and commitment needed for current and future organizational success. The organizational talent pool is its managerial talent referred to as leadership pipeline. It is managed through various systems and processes to help the organization source, reward, evaluate, develop and move employees into various functions and roles. The pipeline bends, turns, and sometimes breaks as organizations identify who is "ready now" and who is "on track" for larger leadership roles. From this perspective, talent management designs structured approach and a robust mechanism for high potential employees to meet organization's needs. The paper attempts to provide a roadmap and a structured approach towards building a high performing organization. Managers want career paths to be defined, so that an adequate number of individuals may be identified and prepared to fill future vacancies. Once career progression patterns are identified, more systematic forecasting of talent requirements is possible. For the development of senior management talent or leadership team, career paths are needed as guidelines for talent management across functional and organizational lines. Career path is one of the important tools for talent management and aligning talent with business strategy. This paper briefly describes the approach for career path and mentoring to develop high performing talent in the organizations.

**Keywords:** Career Path, Talent Management.

**Introduction:** The workplace has experienced an erosion of loyalty and rise of churn. What The Economist calls "the collapse of loyalty" has made it harder for companies to respond to the talent shortage, as people move in and out of jobs more frequently.

This flux is difficult on individuals as well as organizations. Even Gen Y workers, who have a reputation for being fickle, would rather stay with one organization if that organization delivered on its commitments and allowed them to grow and contribute. From the employer's perspective, employee loyalty can help create customer loyalty thus creating a positive, reinforcing relationship.

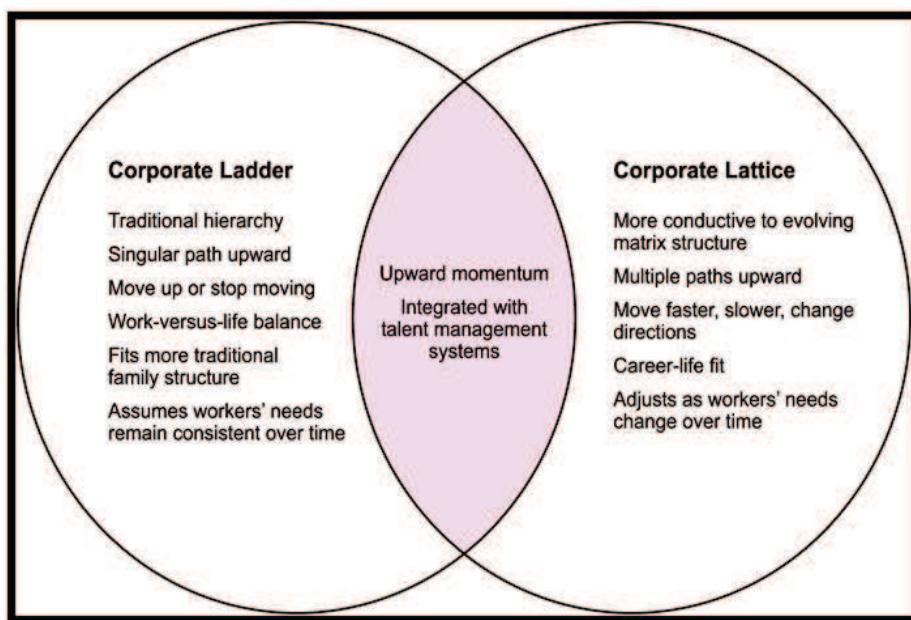
The workforce is changing and so the need of the hour would be to align talent with business strategy with the following challenges:

- Shrinking pool of skilled labour
- Changing family structures
- Increasing number of women workforce
- Evolving expectations of Gen X and Y (Millennial)
- Increasing impact of technology

**Shift from Career Ladder to Career Lattice:** Managers want to see career paths. They intuitively know there are many paths to the same destination. They also know that not everyone wants to be a manager or leader. Many people want to be individual contributors while others want to move into multiple professions and learn everything they can about a specific product or service – their passion is with a business area, a program, or a project. Still others want to follow a path that will allow them to change the pace of work as life requires. Diverse career needs require diverse career paths. Most employed persons move through a patterned sequence of positions or roles, usually related in work content during their professional careers. For example, an individual may view increasing responsibilities or changing work assignments within a single job as a "career," but this subjective view of a career does not constitute a career path, as defined above. An organization needs to move individuals along career paths, to develop the diversity of capabilities necessary to expertise in various levels and types of jobs. At the same time, not all individuals need follow career paths. A research study found that stability, not mobility, was preferred. Neither do individuals need to follow upward career paths. Lateral paths provide exposure to multiple functions and activities and thus develop broader capabilities among

individuals. Many individuals find lateral careers highly satisfying. Career paths have emphasized upward mobility within a single occupation or functional area of work. In many companies career paths have meant step-by-step progression with years of experience. Although often touted as a standalone process, employee career pathing will be most effective if it is integrated into a company's overall talent management strategy. By aligning talent management processes and providing linkage between job roles, desired competencies and key experiences, career paths direct employees towards the company's future competitiveness. But today's world is different. Globalization and technology are creating organizations with fewer rungs and more options for how, when, and where work gets done. The workforce is profoundly different too. From gender to generations, it is more diverse in every sense of the word. Workers' needs, expectations, and definitions of success don't match those of the homogeneous workforce of days gone by. The result: The ladder is splintering. The corporate lattice is emerging. A lattice metaphor more aptly describes the changing world of work - Careers zig and zag. Work is what you do, not where you go. And information moves every which way. The lattice model resolves the paradox of high-performance business and sustainable career-life fit.

The corporate lattice model of career progression allows for multiple paths upward considering the changing needs of both the individual and the organization across various interval of time. It can foster transparency and shared responsibility for career planning which in turn can drive a new brand of loyalty based on the continuous collaboration between the employer and the employee to design customised career paths.



**Figure 1: Corporate Ladder vs Corporate Lattice**

**Source:** Mass Career Customization: Building The Corporate Lattice Organization, Deloitte University Press

**Career Path – An Approach:** An organization that has no career information at all would benefit from the traditional descriptions of career paths. It is instructive to managers to consider past career progression patterns and their own subjective views of possible alternative career paths for employees to follow. In view of today's demands on career management, however, more realistic career information is needed. Career paths need to be specific, not general. They need to be practical, not idealized. They need to be anchored to reality, actual work activities and skill and knowledge requirements. Career paths should:

- Represent real progression possibilities, whether lateral or upward, without implied "normal" rates of progress or forced technical specialization
- Be tentative and responsive to changes in job content, work priorities, organization patterns, and management needs
- Be flexible, to take into consideration the compensating qualities of an individual
- Specify acquirable skills, knowledge, and other specific attributes required to perform the work on each position along the paths, and not merely educational credentials, age, or work experience which may preclude some capable performers from career opportunities. This may be an extensive, ongoing process in

large organizations. For most organizations, however, the challenge is to move simply from a "traditional" approach towards "defined" career paths. A basic approach includes a review of job titles, grouping the positions based on their knowledge of the nature of the work involved. The common characteristics of jobs in each family are identified and specific activities and qualifications differentiating positions within each family. This information is reviewed by selected managers. Position data are refined, and positions are reclassified accordingly. Simply by providing a fresh, objective consideration of realistic career possibilities in an organization, the career development process is improved. The basis for career paths is further strengthened, of course, by additional substantive data on actual work activities on the various types of positions covered. Data may be gathered through selected interviews with incumbents, the use of widely distributed questionnaires or time logs, direct observation of work activities, or use of task check lists. Job descriptions rarely represent actual on-the-job behaviours.

To define career paths in this manner, empirical data are needed. Positions are analysed and grouped based on their job descriptions. The following steps can be followed:

- Step 1: Gather data on actual work activities, their relative importance, and the relative time allocation to each. In short what is termed as Role Clarification Document. Role clarification document create distinctions among job roles in career paths by outlining their core responsibilities, skills and requirements. To do this, organizations consult subject-matter experts, interview function leaders and conduct external industry benchmarking. It is also important to determine the qualifications and expertise associated with different career positions, roles and stages
- Step 2: Identify core competencies that serve as performance standards and define expected results in different functions. Identify patterns of similarity among positions, based on their content and skill-knowledge requirements, and grouping of similar positions as job families to create skills inventory
- Step 3: Mapping the identified skills/competencies with the levels to define the standards required to perform tasks. The mapping process can be designed by interaction with function head and subject matter experts. This is one of the critical stage of the career path framework as this process will further help organization to identify gaps in performance and devise talent management strategies for individuals
- Step 4: Identify logically possible progression lines among the job families and/or mapped skills, representing career roadmaps. Integrate the overall network of these paths as a single, career system depicting progression possibilities. Organizations can link career paths to employee development by prioritizing and identifying key skills that employees should acquire as they move along the career path. Developmental opportunities may include for example, leadership training, stretch assignments, coaching, mentoring, cross functional assignment or international exposure.

A classic approach for career path framework would be as follows:

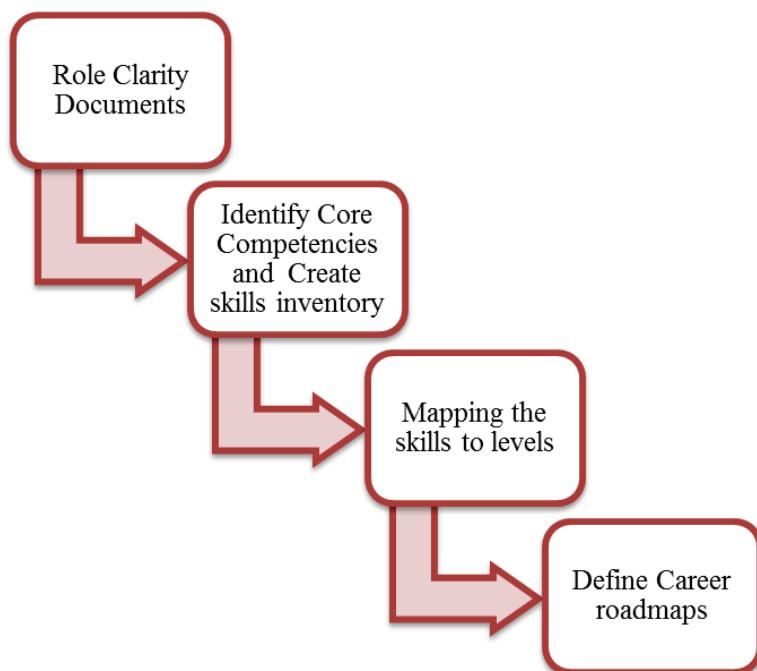


Figure 3: Career Path Framework

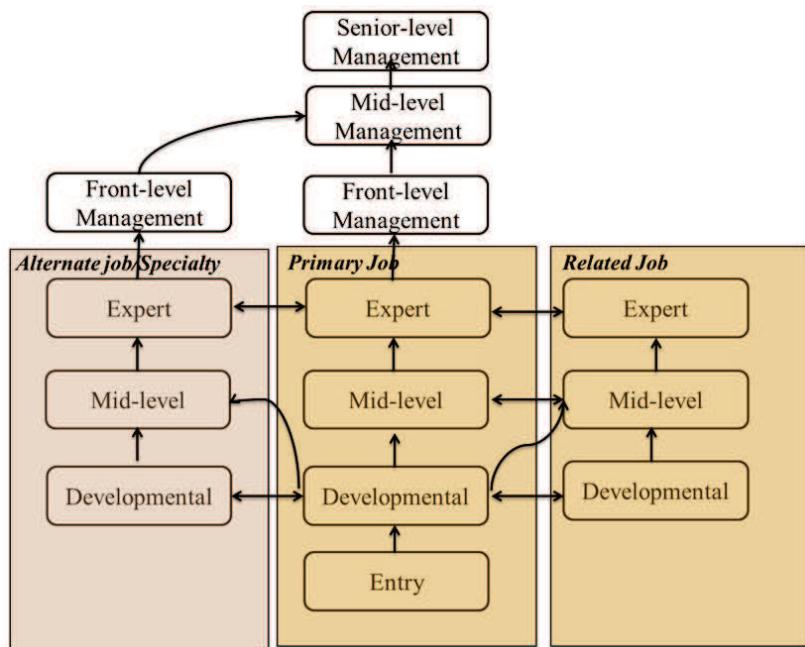


Figure 4: Career Path Depiction

**Career Path Supports Talent Management Cycle:** Many employees' even top performers do not contemplate career planning until they are dissatisfied with their current job situation. That dissatisfaction can lead directly to volunteer turnover if the employee has had no access to information about ongoing career paths within the organization. Studies of the drivers for employee engagement and retention include the importance of challenging and meaningful work with growing career opportunities. Clearly, work must be challenging and meaningful to engage the minds and hearts of talent to produce results, deliver creativity and foster innovation. Challenging work is a key factor. Employees want opportunities and career growth within the organization. Career Path can be implemented in an organization with the following two suggestive approaches mentioned below:

**Approach 1: For All Employees (All Levels):**

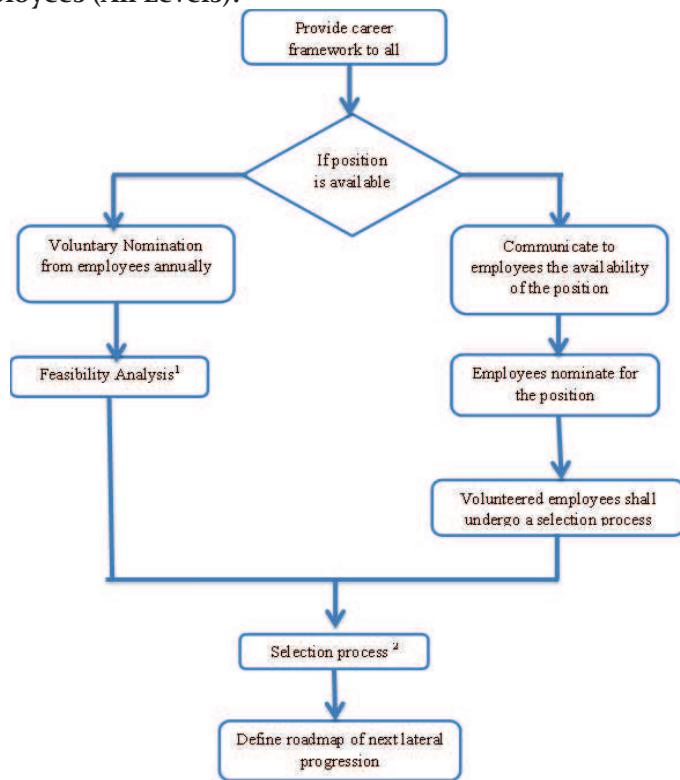


Figure 5: Flow Process for Application to All Employees

### Approach 2: For High Potentials

- The Functional Head have a major role to play
- Criteria for High potentials (HiPOs) needs to be framed
- The HiPOs are to be encouraged for a lateral shift based on the framework provided

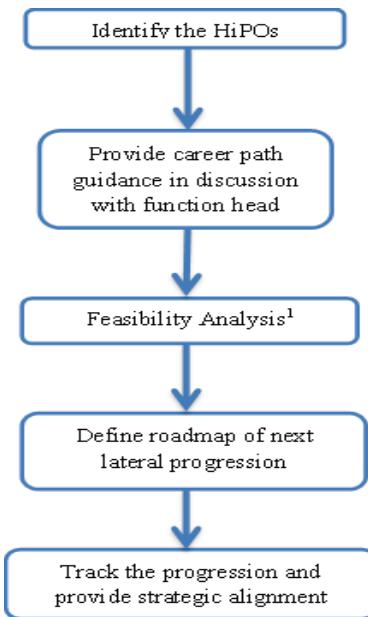


Figure 6: Flow Process for Application to HiPOs

#### Feasibility Analysis:

The following needs considerations:

- Possible Movements (define pathways for the selected employee based on the career path framework)
- The filling of the vacant position created due to movement (shift)
- Minimum required manpower in a function maintained due to the shift
- Additional minimum training required
- Other related factors

#### Selection Process:

The selection process for the employees includes the following:

Sr. No.	Process	Weightage
1.	Supervisor's review	20 %
2.	Performance ratings	20 %
3.	Development Centres • Behavioural • Aptitude	30%
4.	Final Interview	30%

	Option 1 All employees	Option 2 HiPo's	Option 3 Managers and above
Advantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unrestricted Growth and developmental opportunities for employees</li> <li>2. Create a culture of lateral progression</li> <li>3. Cross functional exposure for all</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Less nominations for the process</li> <li>2. Create a culture of competitiveness</li> <li>3. Target group is small</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unrestricted Growth and developmental opportunities for managers and above</li> <li>2. Cross functional exposure for accelerated growth</li> <li>3. Create future senior leaders</li> </ol>

Disadvantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Selection process will be tedious</li> <li>2. Fear of rejection among employees undergoing the selection process</li> <li>3. Framing of the career path would be a critical as it would include candidates at all levels</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Restricted growth and development opportunities for employees</li> <li>2. Selection criteria for Hypo's may lead to demotivate others for lateral shift</li> <li>3. Desire among all to be in the HiPO group</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Below the Target group, the opportunity is restricted</li> </ol>
---------------	---	---	--

Career pathing supports the Talent management cycle in the following ways:

**Talent Acquisition - Expands The Pool of Prospective Employees:** This affirms the organization's commitment to employee development and future career opportunities which enhances the organizations' attractiveness to new hires. Thereby expanding the sourcing pool of active and passive candidates.

**Performance Management – Improves Manager's Feedback to Drive Employee's Performance:** Enhances performance management discussions and feedback by linking current skills and behaviours to future career opportunities. This leads to formal performance reviews and developing, designing and monitoring of employee developmental plans.

**Employee Development – Drives Performance:** This helps employees reach full potential by understanding their current development areas, listing possible career paths and detailing training needs for future growth.

**Succession Planning - Leadership Capability:** Allows an organization to understand the capability of its leadership pool ensuring adequate strengths at critical positions and mitigating risky promotion decisions.

**Retention:** Provides clear career representation of career path for employees within the organization and conveys an ongoing organizational commitment to employee development, thereby driving employee commitment and decrease employee's probability of exit. Career paths provide an incentive for employees to stay with an organization when they see opportunities to advance. Organizations save on costly turnover, recruitment and training expenses.

**Measuring Metrics:** The Career path ratio shows the upward movement versus lateral movement at an organization. If an organization is considered as a pyramid, there is limited amount of up but there is an almost unlimited amount of over. There is a great deal of transfer capability for many differential professional and executive's roles. This is a very low-cost way to enhance and build workforce capability over time. It is also a way to renew and expand experience by giving workers new jobs that stretch and challenge them in new ways with a minimal increase to workforce costs. It is calculated by dividing total promotions by total movement at the organization. This metrics combines two important measures that reflect mobility together into one metric that is more meaningful – total promotions and total transfers. It adds a very powerful dimension for measuring career path mobility and internal movement through the organization. When organizations analyse career path ratio in combination with employee retention and performance, they can identify linkages between and drivers of critical workforce issues. Identifying true drivers of engagement, performance and retention allows organizations to use talent mobility to shape results and improve workforce productivity and business performance while effectively managing workforce costs.

**Way Forward:** Career paths are worth developing only if they are used for talent management. The result is application of the career paths in the development of more realistic individual career objectives and plans. Similarly, through planning, appraisal and counselling activities, managers may help individuals translate these personal career plans into career development actions. It is important that development activities, whether training, job assignments or shift in job activities be realistically attuned to the organization's needs. Career paths provide a vital link between the individual's own career aims and the organization's actual talent requirements. Career paths, however realistic, are beneficial only if translated into individual career action plans. All too often, career planning is practiced as an isolated employee activity without either realistic career path information or relevant appraisal and counselling inputs. Techniques such as career plan or life planning

workshops, structured individual planning exercises, and self-improvement materials, are widely popular today. Career path information may be communicated to individuals in several ways including:

- Publish in digestible pieces, in employee magazines and newsletters
- Included in employee manuals
- Published as a special Career guide or as part of career planning workbooks
- Presented in cassettes, videotapes, or live presentations

At a minimum, a reference book should be provided to each manager, presenting the basic job families, career progression possibilities and related requirements. Through appraisals and counselling, managers may communicate such information and, once they have the abilities and inclination, help individuals evaluate their career development options. Responsibility for career development may rest with the individual, but the manager can have a significant influence on individual decisions and actions. Managers also bring to the employee's additional information useful in career planning: experience, knowledge of changing organizational needs and business plans, and an independent assessment of individual abilities and potential. When managers fail to participate in the career development process, these benefits are lost, and plans are accordingly less realistic for the result. Employees should, then, receive career path information directly and through their managers. In this context, specific plans may be made for realistic development actions.

### References:

1. Cathy Benko and Anne Weisberg, "Mass Career Customization: Building the corporate lattice organization", Deloitte University Press, August 2008
2. Jing Cao, Desree Thomas, "When Developing a Career Path, what are the key elements to Include?", Cornell University ILR School, Spring 2013
3. Janies Waler, "Let's Get Realistic About Career Path", Human Resource Management, Pall, 1976
4. Employee satisfaction with career development practices: a comparative study of Indian and foreign MNC BPO firms – Sri Herald Monis and Dr. T. N. Sreedhar
5. White, D.G. (2012). Driving Change Through Career Models: an Operating System for Integrated Talent Management - Rationale, approach, and the story at Microsoft and ITT. Ontos Global LLC.
6. Campbell, B., Cohen, S., Allen, C. P., and Cormidas, S. (2010) "Our Company's Approach to Career Path Success". Workspan, Worldatwork. 05(10), 65-71.
7. Cathy Benko & Anne Weisberg, "Mass Career Customization", Published August 01, 2008

\*\*\*