How to support employee career advancement

A complete guide to career management best practices
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Introduction:

Why you need to worry about your employees’ career progression

Back in the 1950s and 60s, and even into the 70s, when a person joined a company, they had job for life. If they worked hard, and performed well, they’d eventually get promoted. And, if they showed real promise and ambition, they’d move their way up the corporate ladder. They didn’t really need to do any career planning or management. That was done and decided for them. Or so the story went…

That myth doesn’t exist in today’s workplace. Loyalty and long service are no longer part of the employment deal.

In today’s work world, things are different. Every employee needs to continually evolve and develop their skills so they remain marketable, and they need to chart their own career path.

Companies that want to retain their top performers need to work at engaging and retaining them.

In this context, effective career management plays an important role for employers and the employees.

Building an engaged workforce

Research by Watson Wyatt, Gallup and others makes a clear link between employee development and career management, and employee engagement.

In a 2012 SHRM study, 82% of employees reported that internal career advancement opportunities were important or very important to job satisfaction.

To be engaged, employees need to feel they have a future with their organization. They need to know they have the opportunity to progress in their careers, and further expand or enhance their knowledge, skills and experience.

High employee satisfaction and engagement are linked to higher performance, productivity, retention and business results.

This means that embracing career management best practices and supporting your employees’ career development and progression just makes good business sense.

In this eBook, you’ll:

• Discover the career management best practices research that every organization should have in place.

• Learn how you can adopt these best practices in your organization using the Halogen TalentSpace™ suite.

• Read about success stories from organizations that have implemented these best practices and are seeing great results.
What should you do to support employee career progression?

Research from Bersin by Deloitte, Watson Wyatt, SHRM, and others points to four career management best practices that help drive employee performance, engagement and retention:

When you implement these four practices, you demonstrate to your employees that you value what they have to offer your organization today and tomorrow. It also shows that you’re willing to make an investment in them and their future in the organization. And, you help them find a satisfying career path within your organization.

The two secret ingredients
While these four best practices will help ensure you have an effective career management program in place, there are two secret ingredients you must add to the mix:

Executive commitment
Financial support

Your executives need to endorse your career management program and champion it in the organization. And, they need to be ready to make a long-term commitment to funding the associated activities. Without these two secret ingredients (regardless of how well it’s designed), your program won’t succeed.

Fostering career planning/management discussions
Encouraging multi-directional career progression
Supporting career development
Recruiting from within

Now, let’s look at each of these best practices in more detail.
Best practice #1

Foster career planning/management discussions

It all starts with a conversation.

Research by Watson Wyatt found that highly engaged employees have more frequent career discussions with their supervisors than other employees. Additionally, they have a better sense of the career progression opportunities available to them. Gallup also correlates employee development and progress to employee engagement.

Admittedly, there’s a bit of a chicken and egg scenario going on here.

Are employees more engaged because they’re having career discussions and see a future in the organization? Or do engaged employees autonomously engage in career discussions and seek out career progression opportunities?

Either way, it’s clear that it’s important to find ways to foster an ongoing dialogue about career aspirations and plans between all employees and their managers. One of the best ways to do this is through a formal, HR-driven process.

As an HR professional, you can encourage a regular dialogue by:

- Making career planning discussions a part of your regular performance review meetings
- Creating a separate career planning process
- Designing another process that suits the needs of your organization.

The important thing to remember here, is that you do what it takes to encourage the conversation.

Whose job is it anyway?

In the past, the onus to hold these discussions was on the manager. Today, the experts tell us that it’s best to make the employee responsible for the discussion. The manager needs to play a supporting role.

After all, it’s the employee’s career!

What should managers and employees talk about?

Discussions about an employee’s career aspirations and development needs should touch on:

- The employee’s career aspirations, both short and long term
- The organization’s talent needs from a strategic perspective
- The employee’s current performance
- The employee’s strengths and how they can leverage or elevate them
- Work projects the employee can use to build a portfolio
- The knowledge, skills and experience required for the employee’s next desired role
- The opportunities available for development and progression
- The employee’s specific career development needs and how they can be addressed
- Progress on any existing career development plans
• The key influencers to which the employee needs to communicate their interests and progress

• How the employee can apply for their desired job when they’re ready

All these elements are important because they help the employee and manager put together a specific, actionable plan to help the employee achieve their career goals — one step at a time.

How often should they talk?

As always, that depends... on the situation

On the situation, for example the employee’s readiness for a move, the organization’s needs, the career stage the employee is at, the amount of support or coaching they need, etc.

As a rule of thumb, employees should have a career planning/development conversation with their manager at least once a year. But in some cases, more frequent discussion may be needed or appropriate.

If you’re not sure if the frequency you’re currently using is appropriate, just ask your employees what they think. They’ll be happy to give you their opinions.

Pull it all together in a plan

While it’s great to have the discussion, it’s also important to pull the details together in a plan and then act on it. All the talking in the world won’t necessarily result in action. Make sure each of your employees creates a career management plan for themselves.

To help you out, we’ve put together a detailed template that walks employees through all the steps they need to complete. It also gives them room to record their career goals, create an action plan, and follow through.

You can download the template here.
Best practice #2

Encourage multi-directional career progression

While traditionally, career progression was viewed as a way to move “up” in an organization, today’s best practices suggest that organizations should support multi-directional career progression.

The authors of *The Corporate Lattice* argue that the traditional ladder career model is steadily eroding.

Generally, there are four ways an employee can move in their career.

- **Up:** Gradually assuming greater responsibility, generally in their particular area of expertise. This usually involves eventually moving up the management chain, but can include moving up an individual contributor path, developing greater expertise in one’s domain.

  For example:

  ![Career Progression Diagram](image)

- **Down:** Either relinquishing some level of management responsibility and returning to work in their particular area of expertise, or assuming a lower level role in a completely new area.

  Employees sometimes like to do this as they approach retirement, deal with a personal or family illness, or want to improve work-life balance at certain periods of their lives.

- **Laterally:** Using their current knowledge, skills and experience in a new area. People sometimes do this to broaden their knowledge, skills and experience as a way to prepare them for a leadership/executive role. Or, sometimes, they simply want to introduce variety to their career or explore other related career avenues.

  For example, a product trainer could become a customer support specialist, technical writer, or even a marketing communications writer.

- **Circuitously:** A combination of upward, downward, lateral and diagonal moves.

All of these are valid directions for career progression.

By valuing and encouraging multi-directional career progression, you give employees more options, and you better accommodate their needs.

You also greatly expand the number of career development opportunities open to your employees and see a commensurate increase in employee engagement.
Best practice #3
Support career development

While most organizations support professional development by providing employees with a variety of learning opportunities aimed at improving performance in their current job, fewer support learning opportunities aimed at supporting career progression.

And, that’s what career development needs to do.

It needs to help employees develop the knowledge, skills and experience they’ll need for their next job, not necessarily for their current one.

The importance of formal training
As with all training and development, you can address these learning needs through formal and informal means, but with career development training, formal development plays as important role.

As researchers Monika Hamori, Jie Cao, and Burak Koyuncu state in the Harvard Business Review article, Why Top Young Managers Are in a Nonstop Job Hunt, “Workers reported that companies generally satisfy their needs for on-the-job development and that they value these opportunities, which include high-visibility positions and significant increases in responsibility. But they’re not getting much in the way of formal development, such as training, mentoring, and coaching — things they also value highly. And that’s impacting employee retention.”

Why should you invest in training your employees for their next job?
Because, hopefully, their next job will be with your organization.

We’re not talking about retraining your employees in a completely new field.

Rather, if you think again about career progression being multi-directional, career development should focus on:

- Deepening an employee’s existing knowledge, skills and experience so they can further specialize in their area.
- OR -

- Expanding the employee’s existing knowledge, skills and experience so they can use them in a new area.
- OR -

- Helping the employee acquire additional complementary strategic skills.

It’s also important to remember that career development should also focus on helping the organization achieve its strategic goals.

Make a plan
Invite your employees to work with their managers to create a career development plan. The plan should include a mix of formal and informal learning opportunities that support the employee’s career goals and the organization’s strategic goals.

During the process, employees and managers should consider things like tuition subsidies, conference attendance, and professional association participation, in addition to courses, readings, coaching, mentoring and developmental goals.
Best practice #4

Recruit from within

When a job opens up in your organization, whether it’s as a result of a departure or because a new role has been created, you should start by looking for candidates inside the organization.

If you have a talent pool-based succession planning program in place, you’ll have a pool of candidates at varying stages of readiness for roles in all the key areas in your organization. So you can look to your internal talent pools first to fill a vacancy.

But even if you don’t have a candidate in your talent pool, you should still look to publicize the opening internally, and search for individuals among your high-performing, high-potential employees.

By recruiting and filling roles from within, you help increase employee retention, and you also help maintain valuable corporate knowledge, intellectual property and memory.
Effective career management using the Halogen TalentSpace™ suite

So how do you implement these four career management best practices and ensure everyone in your organization is following them? The Halogen TalentSpace™ suite can help.

Here are just a few of the many ways.

- Fostering career planning/management discussions
- Encouraging multi-directional career progression
- Supporting career development
- Recruiting from within
Best practice #1
Foster career planning/management discussions

With Halogen Performance™, the performance management module in the Halogen TalentSpace™ suite, you can configure any kind of process and form you want and need.

This means you can create a career management process that includes a step for regular employee-manager discussions.

Or you can include a career planning section on your performance review form, so the discussion happens when managers and employees are reviewing employee performance, setting goals, and putting plans in place to address professional development needs.

With Halogen Performance, you can also invite employees to document their broader skills and abilities as well as their career plans in their talent profiles. These profiles are completely configurable, so you can include all the sections you need.

Invite employees to document their broader skills and abilities as well as their career plans.
If you also have Halogen 1:1 Exchange™, Halogen's one-on-one meeting management tool, you can include a career planning question as a conversation starter, to prompt managers and employees to discuss the employee's career plans in their regular meetings.

If you have Halogen Job Description Builder™, Halogen's job description creation and management tool, you can allow employees and managers to view all the job descriptions in your library, so they can see the requirements and responsibilities for other roles. This can help employees explore various career paths and see what knowledge, skills, experience and education they need to move into a desired role.

360-degree feedback can often help an employee and their manager get a fuller picture of the employee's performance, strengths and areas for development. It can also guide career planning/development discussions.

With Halogen 360 Multirater™, Halogen's 360-degree assessment module, you can create automated HR or manager-driven 360-degree feedback surveys, gather quantitative and qualitative feedback, and decide who gets to see the aggregated results.

Finally, if an employee needs greater personal insight to direct their career planning and guide their discussions with their manager, you can use the Halogen® Myers-Briggs® module to gain insight into the employee's natural preferences.
Best practice #2

Encouraging multi-directional career progression

There are three main ways the Halogen TalentSpace™ suite can help you encourage multi-directional career progression.

With Halogen Succession™, our talent pool-based succession planning module, you can create talent pools for all key areas of the organization, then assign your high-potential employees to these for development.

This means that, in addition to creating talent pools for developing future managers and leaders, you can also create pools for functional areas, such as technology, customer service, product architecture, finance, or any other area that is strategic to your organization.

By creating talent pools for these other areas, you help groom key contributors and specialists who are looking to assume greater responsibility in an area or leverage their core skills in a new area — without necessarily climbing the management chain.

You can also help encourage multi-directional career progression, using Halogen Job Description Builder™. This module makes it easy for you to create, manage and assign your job descriptions.

The module also allows you to make your job descriptions viewable to managers and employees so they can explore career options in the organization.

Browsing job descriptions in this way lets employees identify the requirements for a desired role and see how their current knowledge, skills and abilities could be used in a different role.

Finally, Halogen Performance Talent Profiles let your employees view the education, skills and experience held by people already in a desired role (if you’ve configured them to allow employees to view others’ profiles).

Employees can also easily contact these employees so they can talk about the role, ask questions, and expand their network.
Best practice #3

Supporting career development

To encourage employees and managers to establish career development plans for employees, you can include a career development planning section on your regular performance review form.

This allows employees and managers to discuss and document the employee's career aspirations, and assign career development activities when they're already getting together to discuss performance and goals.

Or, you can create a separate process and form specifically for career planning. Halogen Performance™ gives you the flexibility to support career development planning when and how you want.

If you have our learning management system, Halogen Learning™, you can create learning paths that set out learning activities to prepare employees for career progression in a specific role or field.
You can also use Halogen 360 Multirater™ to gather 360-degree feedback on an employee’s demonstration of the competencies required for a desired role and assign development plans/activities as appropriate.

If you use Halogen Succession™ for your succession planning program when you’re conducting talent assessments, you can allow employees to nominate themselves for membership in a talent pool, based on their career interests. Every employee in a talent pool is assigned a customized development plan to help them achieve proficiency in all the required competencies.

With the Halogen® Myers-Briggs® module, employees and managers can also leverage the information on strengths and areas for development provided in the employee’s Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® profile to guide their career development planning.
Best practice #4

Recruiting from within

When it comes to recruiting from within, Halogen Succession™ is your best tool. The module’s talent pool report lets you see the readiness of every member in that talent pool.

And with one click, you can then access an employee’s talent profile to see the details of their education, skills and experience. This makes it easy for you to identify the best candidate for a job.

But even without Halogen Succession, Halogen Performance™ lets you search employee talent profiles for particular knowledge, skills, experience — whatever you’re looking for. The software even lets you view employee talent profiles side-by-side, so you compare internal candidates.
Effective career management in practice

In operation for more than 40 years, Pine Cove Christian Camps is a growing and inspirational youth camp that employs more than 1,400 full- and part-time staff. To support Pine Cove’s mission to help its staff grow personally and professionally, the camp transitioned from its old manual performance management practices to Halogen Software’s cloud-based performance management solution.

“At Pine Cove, we greatly believe in the development of our employees and in helping them to grow both personally and professionally,” says Stephen Hughes, Director of Operations. “That means helping to launch our employees into their careers at Pine Cove and taking pride in those employees who use their training here to pursue meaningful opportunities elsewhere.”

Pine Cove automated its performance management process and centralized the data so it could be used more effectively to drive learning and professional development initiatives for employees.

As Hughes also explains, “The reporting functionality in Halogen Performance is a powerful tool that allows us to assess employee strengths and weaknesses and ensure an individual’s skills are being optimized to their fullest potential.”

As HR generalist Jesse Garner explains, the performance management culture at Pine Cove now includes weekly one-on-one meetings with employees and managers. “Every week, full-time employees receive one hour of dedicated personal development time with their manager. At least once or twice a month these meetings are used to reflect on goals and accomplishments. This kind of information exchange is really valued by our employees, and many managers use Halogen to input the data from these conversations into their goals and development plans.”

“Halogen supports our philosophy to develop employees while they’re here with us at Pine Cove. We want to help employees prepare for career progression. These tools can help us uphold and deliver on this commitment.”

Stephen Hughes, Director of Operations
Providing role clarity in practice

Sun-Rype Products Ltd. is a 64-year-old Canadian juice and fruit snack company based in Kelowna, British Columbia.

HR veteran Michelle Reid joined the organization in early fall 2003. Passionate about engaging people and implementing creative solutions that support best practices, Reid looked forward to tapping into the discretionary efforts of the organization’s nearly 400 employees to help increase productivity.

As Sun-Rype’s President and CEO, Dave McAnerney explains, “In the food manufacturing sector we’re seeing flat industry growth and at Sun-Rype we see this as an opportunity for innovation. In such a competitive environment we need a performance management tool that helps us make sure people are focused on priorities and allows us to re-establish and change goals and priorities on a dime.”

So they purchased Halogen Performance to help them improve the way the managed employee performance, development and rewards.

In addition to providing a host of other benefits, they’ve seen

- Increased accountability and focus
- Better organizational alignment
- Overall improvement in corporate culture and employee engagement
- Turnover rate decrease from 20% to 4%
- 64% of leadership positions are now filled by promotions from within

Sun-Rype sees the solution as a positive development tool that leverages an individual’s strengths and provides stretch goals. It wasn’t about capturing job descriptions and activity done within those parameters, it was about focusing on business needs and the employee’s ability to meet targeted goals.

“People feel really good about what they do and what they contribute, knowing that there are a lot of different promotions and leadership roles that have evolved through our leadership development program, which is part of our performance management and career development approach.”

Michelle Reid, HR Manager
### Key questions for your organization

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you currently do to support employee career development and progression?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have higher than desired employee turnover? Is the lack of career development or career progression opportunities a contributing factor?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which of the best practices described in this eBook does your organization currently follow?</td>
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<td>Which ones should you think of implementing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How could you measure the business impact of adopting better career management practices?</td>
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Career management resources

Here are a few of the resources that can help you:

To learn more about how to support career advancement, visit the Learn section of our website.

You’ll find “How To” articles, webinars, whitepapers, forms and templates, and more.

And become a regular reader of our TalentSpace blog.

Template: Career management plan template

How to: Employee development center of excellence

How to: Developing and retaining top talent center of excellence

How to: Should you tell employees they’re part of the succession plan?

How to: Why embracing those prickly conversations about career development will pay off

How to: Five techniques to negotiate your way to a better career… without anyone knowing you’re negotiating

How to: Career development: the 5 most important things to do to show the world you’re freaking awesome at what you do

How to: Career management — why bother?

How to: Why you need a career plan: the future of your career depends on it
Wrapping it up

We hope you’ve found this resource valuable in your talent management journey. At Halogen, our vision is to help organizations like yours build world-class workforces that are aligned and engaged, and delivering exceptional results. We know that your people can be a sustainable competitive advantage.

If you’d like to access the latest thinking on each of the talent management facets discussed here, check out Halogen’s TalentSpace Blog.

About Halogen Software

Halogen Software offers an organically built cloud-based talent management suite that reinforces and drives higher employee performance across all talent programs — whether that is recruiting, performance management, learning and development, succession planning or compensation. With 2,000 customers worldwide, Halogen has been recognized as a market leader by major business analysts and has garnered the highest customer satisfaction ratings in the industry. Halogen Software’s powerful, yet simple-to-use solutions, which also include industry-vertical editions, are used by organizations that want to build a world-class workforce that is aligned, inspired and focused on delivering exceptional results.

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