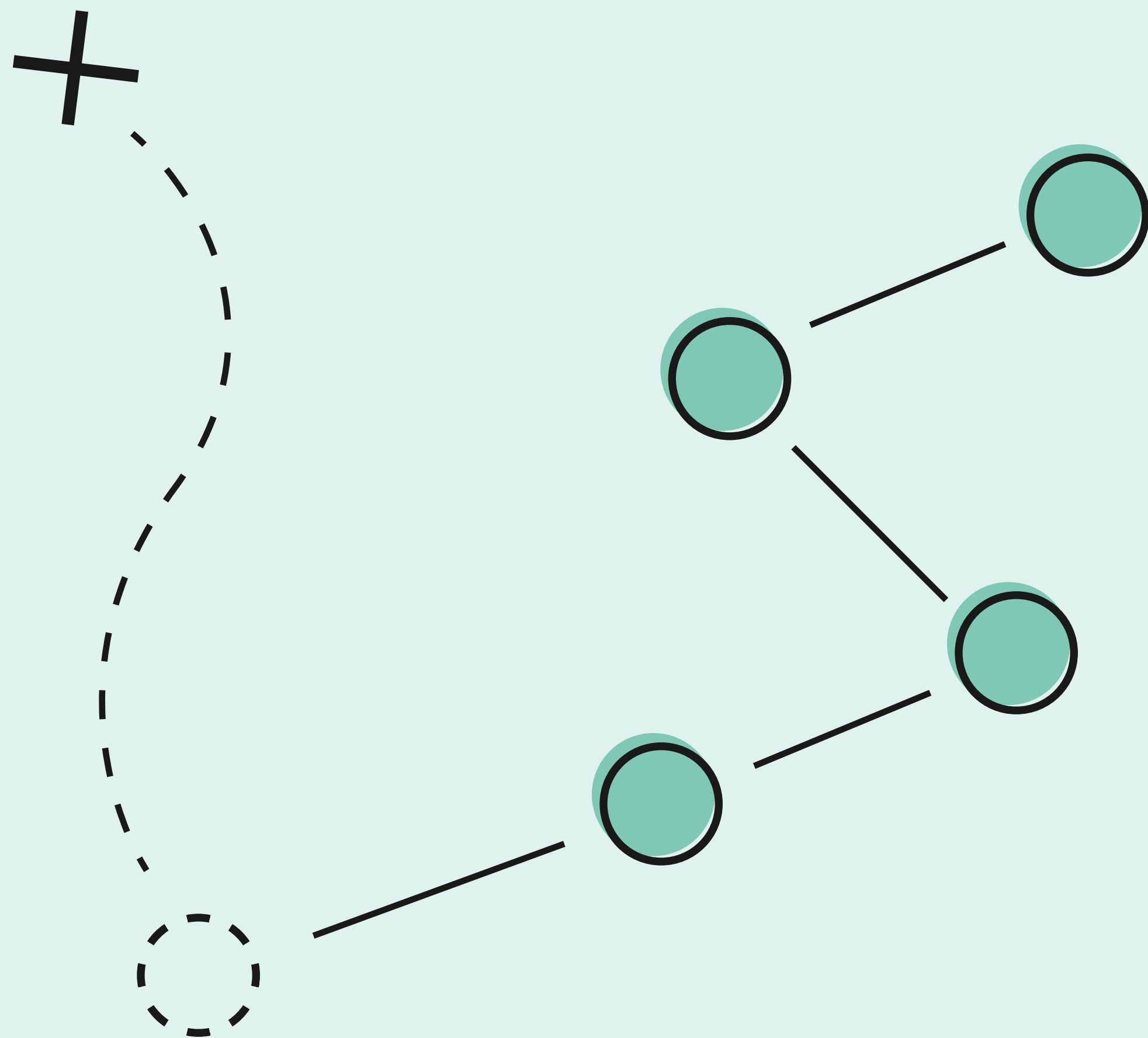


The Future of Career Pathing – Why Traditional Career Pathing is Dead.



Introduction

I recently hosted a series of executive breakfasts to bring talent development and career industry leaders together to discuss how they are preparing for the future of work.

It was immediately apparent that people priorities are shifting from a team mandate to an organizational mandate. Team structures, incentives, and KPIs are changing to reflect this and talent leaders are investing heavily in systems, skilling, reskilling and upskilling programs, and leadership training as potential solutions.



Dave Wilkin
Founder & CEO
Ten Thousand Coffees

“The purpose of a corporation should no longer advance only the interest of shareholders. It must also include investing in our employees by supporting them through training and education that help develop new skills for a rapidly changing world.”

Source: The Business Roundtable, a group of nearly 200 chief executives from companies like Pepsico, Apple and Bank of America (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/19/business/business-roundtable-ceos-corporations.html>)

After the first event of the series, I was pulled aside by the SVP of Talent Development at a leading investment firm. She explained that although she wants to provide employees with a clear career path and the new skills to be successful, the increasing complexity and variety of roles, skills, and paths made this almost impossible for her to do. At each event thereafter, her sentiments were echoed by other leaders time and time again. I concluded the series with a few burning questions:

- Has the evolution of work killed traditional career pathing?
- How are employees and people managers navigating this increasing complexity?
- How do talent leaders enable employees to build enduring, fulfilling careers for the future of work?

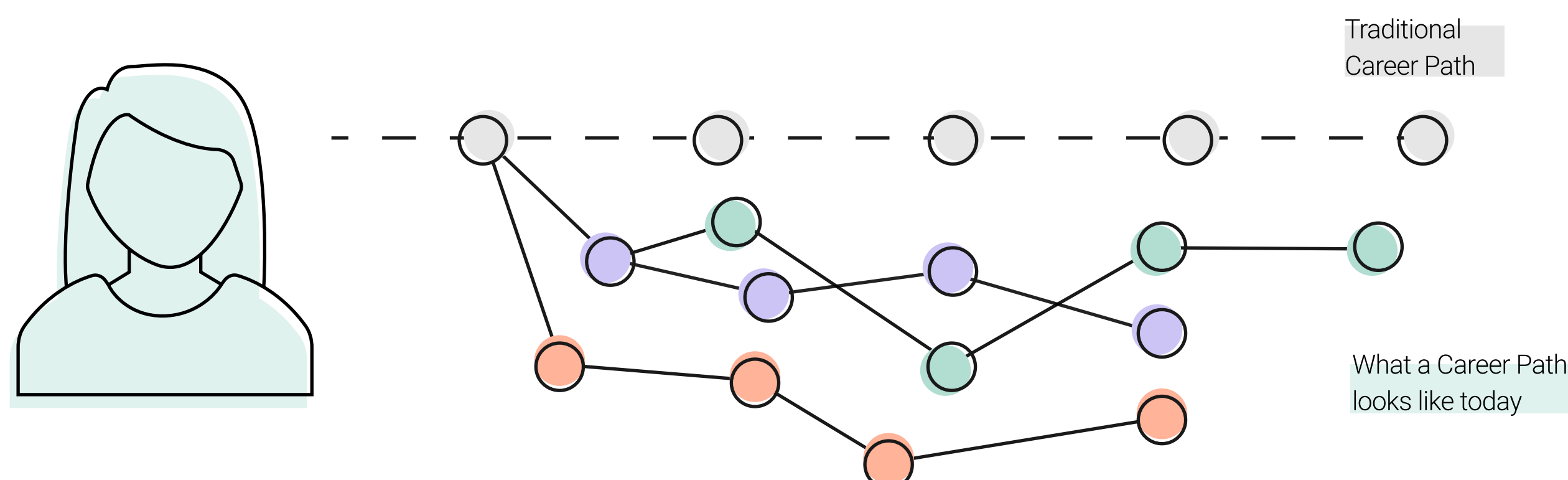
To find the answers, our team interviewed people at every level of several Fortune 500 companies. What we found was a problem that increases in complexity every day and reveals itself in patterns that profoundly affect the future of career pathing, career development, and internal mobility.

Methodology

We interviewed executive people leaders, people managers, and employees at 18 different organizations. All participants and organizations involved have been kept anonymous, and research findings are based on the most common responses.

For more information on this methodology, refer to the [Google Ventures Research Sprint Model](#).

Workplace complexity has killed traditional career pathing.



Enterprise organizations are hitting a wall. Many face looming restructures (if not already in the midst of one) to prepare for the future of work. They are moving from rigid, predictable hierarchies to flatter, matrixed structures to become more agile. The pace of change continues to accelerate and create new and unique career paths that do not conform to the traditional mold of linear progression.

There are more possibilities for employees than ever before, but connecting employees to the right opportunities is where things get cloudy. Modern-day career paths require a complicated web of skills, domain-specific expertise, and personal traits to advance in any given career.

The half-life of professional skills is

5 years.

Source:
<https://eab.com/insights/daily-briefing/workplace/the-half-life-of-professional-skills-is-5-years>

Most organizations we interviewed are actively working on cataloging every internal employee, job description, and skill requirement. In doing this, they realized that many functionally similar roles would have different job descriptions and required skills.

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} 70,000 & & 96,000 & & 5,000,000 & = & 3.36 \times 10^{16} \\ \text{Employees} & \times & \text{Job Descriptions} & \times & \text{Skills} & & \text{Job-Skill Combos} \end{array}$$

Source: Employees and Job Descriptions from <https://joshbersin.com/2020/02/the-future-of-work-lessons-in-job-architecture-and-career-management>

This problem multiplies across lines of business. The emerging trend is a nearly endless list of **department-job-skill combos**. One interviewee who had completed the exercise in 2018 admitted that by the time they had compiled the results of a query, the data had already become obsolete. Today—two years later—they have abandoned the catalog altogether.

"The time and effort required to map these career paths and skill ontologies are so great that they become obsolete before they are even complete."

- VP HR, Consumer Products

The World Economic Forum states:

35% of the skills workers need to have will change within 3 years.

Source: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/07/skill-reskill-prepare-for-future-of-work>

The impossible manager task.

The retreat from traditional career modelling has left the burden of career development to fall squarely on the shoulders of people managers. It's on them to outline a personalized development plan and act as a connector for their direct reports. It is a high-touch, high-value process that requires close collaboration between managers and direct reports. A personalized development plan in its ideal state is tailored to specific outcomes that benefit the employee, manager, and organization as a whole.

"Managers have become career and development concierges — That is, if they can make it a priority, and they have the abilities to be effective."

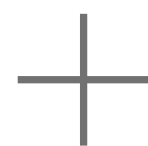
- Global Head of Mobility, Professional Services

Employees' direct managers are seen as the gatekeepers to their career development and opportunities within the organization. This push-pull relationship has implicitly increased the influence that a manager has on a direct report's career.

The to-do list of a people manager is **overwhelming**.

People managers need to:

- ☐ Meet their project objectives
- ☐ Oversee direct report project objectives
- ☐ Assess staffing needs and new skills required across the team
- ☐ Onboard and train employees
- ☐ Manage employee relationships and resolve potential conflicts
- ☐ Collect data for direct report performance management
- ☐ Track and report on their own career development and personal goals
- ☐ Regular 1:1's with direct reports



While simultaneously:

- ☐ Understand and assess the skill gaps of their direct reports
- ☐ Set developmental goals with direct reports to address those gaps
- ☐ Connect direct reports with tools and programming to help them improve their skills
- ☐ Actively seek career opportunities across the business that match their direct reports' needs
- ☐ Broker and negotiate on behalf of direct reports for internal career moves

The burden of direct report career development is yet **another set of responsibilities** added to a long list of responsibilities in the manager's purview. Unfortunately, the research showed the quality of and approach to management was highly inconsistent. Some managers succeed while others flounder — leaving employees on an island.

All managers recognized prioritizing career development conversations is a struggle.

Every employee identified having a goal for their career, but lacked visibility into how it could play out.

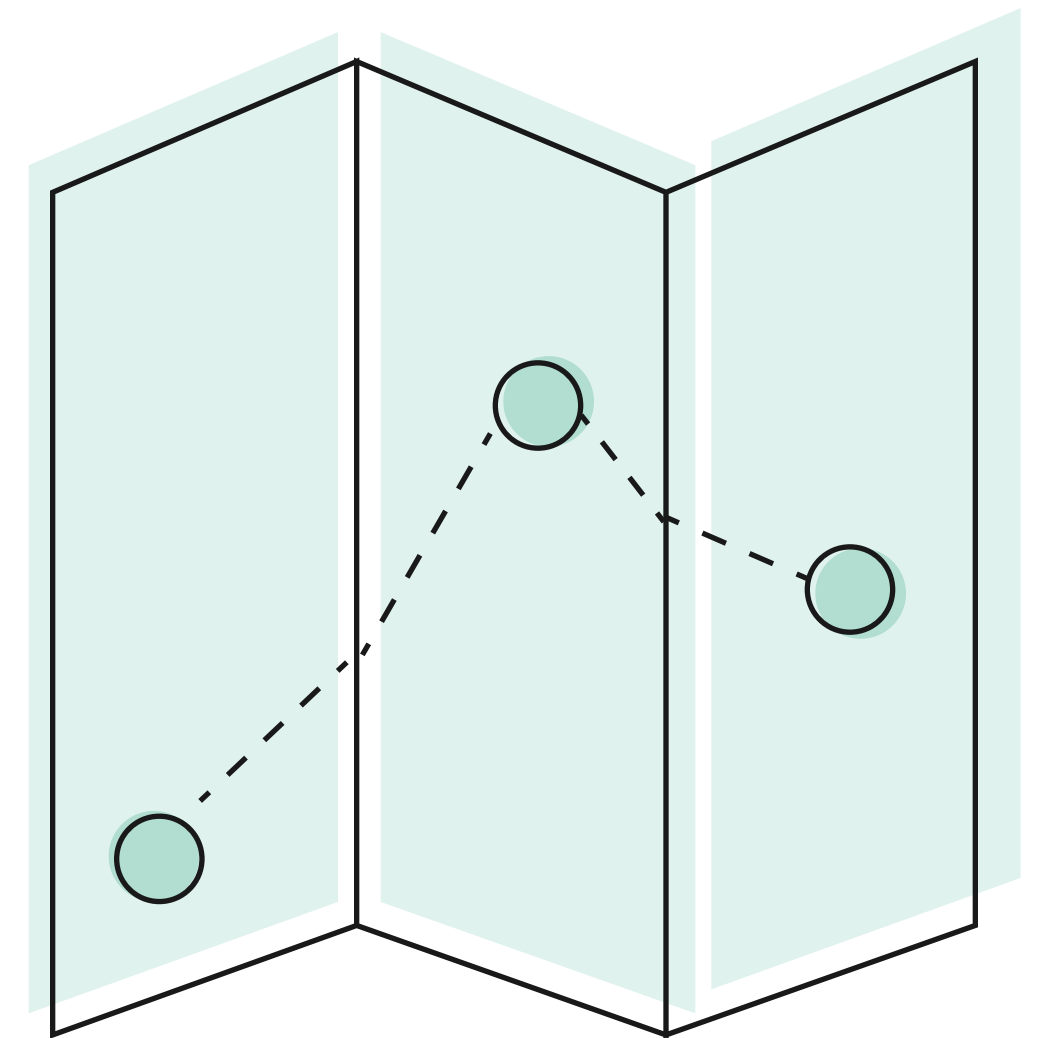
Every employee wanted more support from their manager to grow within the organization.

Exploring opportunities — With or without a guide.

The best case scenario: A servant leader.

The current best-case scenario is a manager who prioritizes the growth of their direct reports in tandem with getting projects completed at a high level. Projects assigned to their team should be a mix of opportunities to hone current skillsets and "stretch projects" that provide opportunities for growth. The manager should also act as an advocate and connect direct reports to relevant peers, leaders, and opportunities within the organization.

By having a manager with the above qualities, the employee will have a sense of purpose, be guided to their future goals, and feel supported in taking risks and learning new skills. By finding personal success in the company, they will, in turn, contribute to the company's success.



The reality for most: A case study.

Meet Michelle. Michelle has been working at the same institution since she graduated from university three years ago. She wants to talk to her manager about what her possible pathways are. However, Michelle must compete for her manager's attention against 21 other direct reports. She uses the little time they do have to get support on more pressing projects. Instead, she spends time on her own doing research, taking notes at company events, and paving a mental career pathway that she keeps mostly to herself. Still, after three years, she feels lost in an organization of over 11,000 people and does not know where to go next. While this is happening, job postings at other organizations jump out to her as she continues her search for answers online.

What happens when Michelle doesn't get the best case scenario manager?

“75% of workers who voluntarily left their jobs, did so because of their [managers] and not because of the position itself.”

Source: Redrock International

Every single organization we spoke with wants to empower employees to take their path into their own hands.

To scale career development for everyone, the burden must be lifted off of managers and employees must become explorers within their organization. By providing tools and resources for greater autonomy and visibility, they can build individual career plans and a sense of purpose and community.

Across the board, ownership is unclear.

- **Employees** think career path development is 100% on the manager.
- **Managers** think responsibility is 50/50 between themselves and their direct reports.
- **HR Leaders** think it falls 100% on employees to self-select development opportunities. Yet the greatest investment is in manager training, rather than solutions to put more control in the hands of employees.

Organizations want to create development and internal mobility opportunities for employees, and it's clear that managers play a critical role. It's also clear that the current structure, where employees are completely dependant on their manager for these opportunities, is broken.

\$ 24 billion invested in manager training in 2018.

Beyond manager training, companies are also investing in programs like rotational programs, secondments, formal mentorships, mobility ambassadors, internal job fairs, and more.

Why doesn't it work?

Organization	Managers	Employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited and siloed systems to create visibility into internal opportunities• Inconsistent process for creating development goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Competing priorities between project deliverables and people management• Manager efficacy varies• Talent hoarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full-time focused on business-critical priorities while expected to take personal time to consider career paths• Unclear on who owns career development

Talent hoarding is the #1 reason internal mobility fails.

Incentive structures motivate managers to hang onto the top members of their team. But, if those top performers aren't able to explore opportunities to grow, they're likely to leave the company altogether.

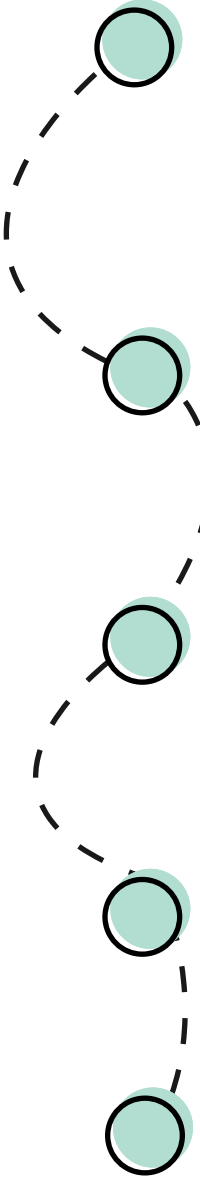
59% of employees are afraid what their manager would think if they were to speak to a manager of another team.

So what's the answer? Cut out the middleman.

Career pathing does not have room for gatekeepers. With people managers acting as the incidental gatekeepers to internal mobility, organizations are doing employees a disservice. Not everyone will get a best-case scenario manager and with an increasingly complex and rapidly changing career landscape, it's unfair to put managers in that position on top of their other responsibilities.

Complex and likely inaccurate data systems can also act as a digital middleman. In their current state, they create confusion and lack the personalization needed to be effective. Put people in the driver seat to own their development path.

Key insights

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- The time and effort required to map career paths and skill ontologies are often so great that they become obsolete before they are complete.
 - Traditional linear career paths are no longer relevant in rapidly changing organizations. They are being replaced by a matrix of roles that are based on skills, domain-specific expertise, and personal traits.
 - People managers are overburdened with responsibilities. The most significant risk in a bad manager is losing top talent.
 - Employees want to have a career path but experience blockers such as gatekeeper managers.
 - Not solving for cultural barriers in the workplace, such as lack of visibility and organizational politics, result in problems like isolated employees, regrettable churn, and loss of institutional knowledge.

Everyone is struggling to keep up with the rapidly changing organizational demands of managing talent. Skill ontologies fail to move quickly enough to make an impact. The consequence of which is increased expectation of already over-encumbered managers. In most cases, these factors reveal themselves in symptoms such as increased regrettable churn, unhappy employees trapped in roles and talent hoarding across teams. To overcome these issues, we need a new set of rules when building our talent strategies for the future.

The new rules of Career Pathing:

1) Talent needs to be empowered to take control of their own development.

Remove the manager as a gatekeeper to development. Do not rely on a complex system and likely inaccurate data to predict a perfect career path for every employee. These are people, after all. And they want to own their development.

2) Support employees seeking and sharing knowledge beyond their direct manager.

Create a culture of learning and support at an organizational level. Foster high-touch relationships that remove silos and scale beyond the dependency on direct managers.

3) Create a people-driven system for the best of both worlds.

People-to-people development is a proven solution, but hinges on the manager. Systems bring development to the masses, but can be inaccurate and impersonal. Best-in-class career development means putting them together.



Ten Thousand Coffees is a people-first enterprise career development platform. We connect people for developmental relationships and informal learning opportunities. 150+ organizations trust Ten Thousand Coffees to scale, automate, and measure winning career development experiences.

