

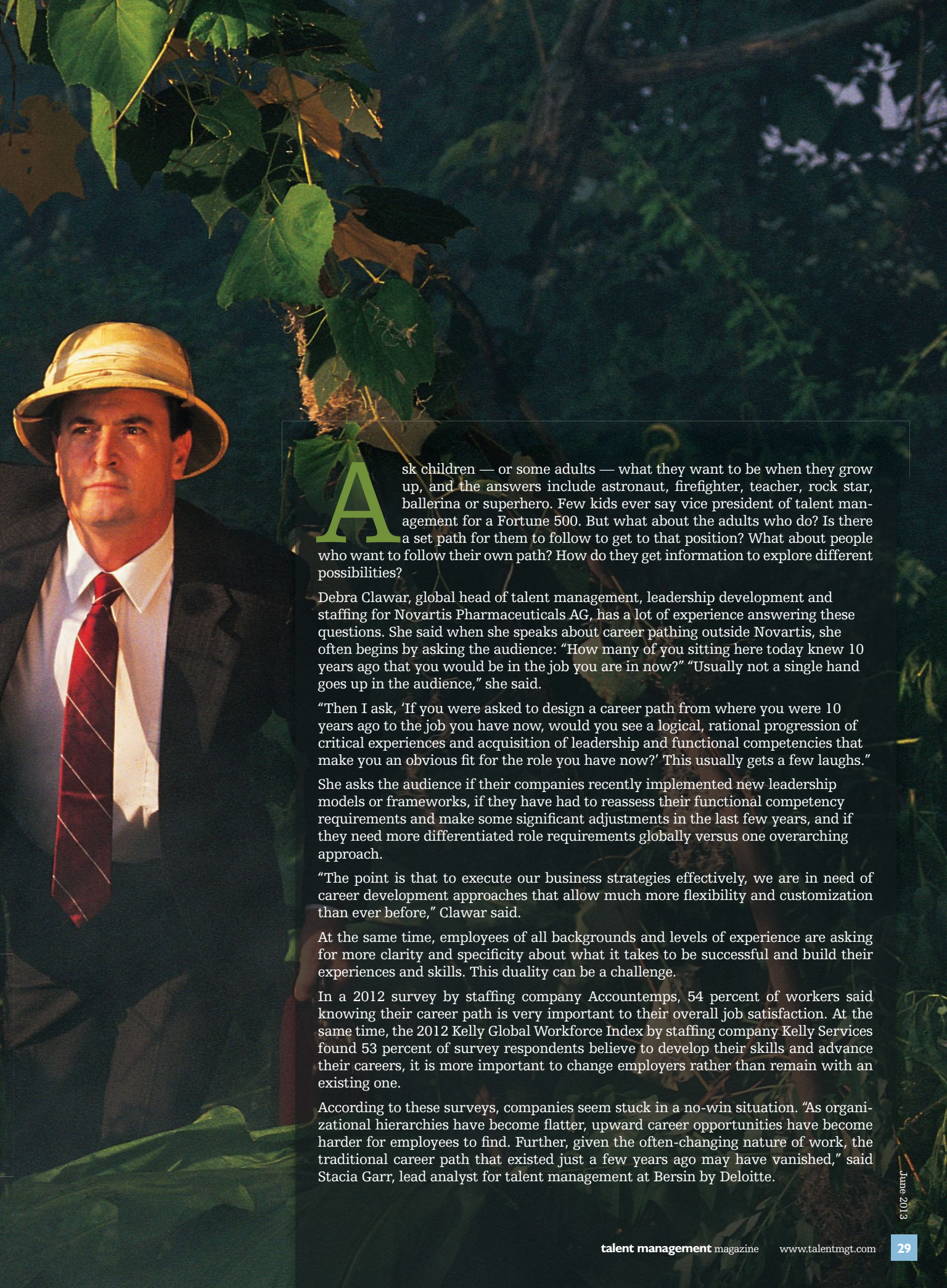


Help Employees Explore

# New Career Paths

Randy Emelo

Transparency and knowledge sharing help provide answers for employees seeking clarity and specificity about what it takes to be successful and build their careers.



**A**sk children — or some adults — what they want to be when they grow up, and the answers include astronaut, firefighter, teacher, rock star, ballerina or superhero. Few kids ever say vice president of talent management for a Fortune 500. But what about the adults who do? Is there a set path for them to follow to get to that position? What about people who want to follow their own path? How do they get information to explore different possibilities?

Debra Clawar, global head of talent management, leadership development and staffing for Novartis Pharmaceuticals AG, has a lot of experience answering these questions. She said when she speaks about career pathing outside Novartis, she often begins by asking the audience: “How many of you sitting here today knew 10 years ago that you would be in the job you are in now?” “Usually not a single hand goes up in the audience,” she said.

“Then I ask, ‘If you were asked to design a career path from where you were 10 years ago to the job you have now, would you see a logical, rational progression of critical experiences and acquisition of leadership and functional competencies that make you an obvious fit for the role you have now?’ This usually gets a few laughs.”

She asks the audience if their companies recently implemented new leadership models or frameworks, if they have had to reassess their functional competency requirements and make some significant adjustments in the last few years, and if they need more differentiated role requirements globally versus one overarching approach.

“The point is that to execute our business strategies effectively, we are in need of career development approaches that allow much more flexibility and customization than ever before,” Clawar said.

At the same time, employees of all backgrounds and levels of experience are asking for more clarity and specificity about what it takes to be successful and build their experiences and skills. This duality can be a challenge.

In a 2012 survey by staffing company Accountemps, 54 percent of workers said knowing their career path is very important to their overall job satisfaction. At the same time, the 2012 Kelly Global Workforce Index by staffing company Kelly Services found 53 percent of survey respondents believe to develop their skills and advance their careers, it is more important to change employers rather than remain with an existing one.

According to these surveys, companies seem stuck in a no-win situation. “As organizational hierarchies have become flatter, upward career opportunities have become harder for employees to find. Further, given the often-changing nature of work, the traditional career path that existed just a few years ago may have vanished,” said Stacia Garr, lead analyst for talent management at Bersin by Deloitte.

Given these new realities, Garr said companies are increasingly emphasizing lateral career shift options to support employees. "These shifts give employees an opportunity to explore new and different parts of the organization, learn new skills that will make them more marketable and also give them a more holistic view of the company."

### The Power of Autonomy and Empowerment

Companies are beginning to give employees the power to explore their passions and interests within the work context so they can find the right position and career. While employees are learning and building new skills, companies gain an engaged and committed workforce that wants to bring their passions to the job.

Human capital management consultant and writer Jon Ingham said companies need to become more employee-focused when it comes to career pathing, but companies aren't supporting their people's careers the way they used to. He said the main reason people are more focused on their careers is because they have to be.

"However, the other reason employees are doing this is because they can," he said. "New technologies, both social media systems and the more traditional, integrated talent management systems, are allowing employees to understand more about the possibilities available to them to advance their careers and are supporting them to take action to develop their careers, too."

The one area where companies may be lacking is in systems and structures that focus on collaborative knowledge sharing dedicated to individual employee improvement. Social networking tools do not provide guidance on how to build meaningful connections, how to help direct relationships for intentional learning or drive forward on a career path. However, collaborative learning systems are a promising method to facilitate these things.

"Through social collaboration, collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, employees share insights obtained through their professional lives with a wide network," Garr said. "This sharing of information can help other employees identify individuals who have the type of knowledge they want or need, and if they have a desire themselves to move into that type of role. Thus, collaboration can expose employees to a wider variety of possible roles (both lateral and vertical) than they likely would have experienced otherwise."

Collaborative learning technologies can help organizations support their employees as they explore their unique career paths, and companies can give employees what they need without dictating every step of the path. Individuals can learn about other areas in the company from people in their networks and examine what sort of skills and knowledge other career options require. They also can build a network of knowledge advisers who can share insights and provide feedback as they consider how their skills could translate into different functional areas.

"Those potential roles are already related in some capacity to what employees already do, and as such those positions have the potential to be real options," Garr said. "Further, as a result of the existing collaboration interactions, employees already have access to someone within the role, so they know where to turn when they are looking for a contact for informational interviews."

### The Benefits of a Blended Approach

As with most things in life, there is no single, simple answer for such a complex issue. What typically works well, however, is a blended approach.

## Reader Reaction

We asked our Twitter and LinkedIn followers if they offer employees opportunities to move sideways instead of up and what they think of this trend.

### Via Twitter:



**@NecessitysChild:** I do not put my firm's interests ahead of my team members. Builds trust and increases engagement.



**@JaiPMehta:** Yes, by engaging the member, by asking for interest with the intention to provide an opportunity where the member can excel.



**@m\_shipman:** We have to allow sideways movement since the career ladder has been replaced with the career lattice.

### Via LinkedIn:



**Elizabeth McGreal Cook:** I work in higher education advancement, and we see this quite often. Many of our successful major gift officers and communication professionals move from private industry to higher education mid-career. Although this could be viewed as a sideways move, it opens them up to opportunities in an entirely new professional field.



**Aaron Parker:** The military sees this trend as well.

As military officers separate from service, many move into similar industry positions and many get picked up by headhunters for diverse management positions at various private industries. Movement into education is another sub-current of transition for military officers.



**Angela Martin:** Younger minds are in most cases not ready to make a firm decision about what path they wish to follow and tend to look for organizations that offer fellowships, management training and mentorship programs. All of these programs offer hands-on experiences in different areas of the business and help develop cross-functional skills. Although these programs don't officially constitute career ladder definition, they assist in giving insight on how to climb that ladder — horizontal or vertical.

What do you think? Join the discussion at [tinyurl.com/ct2ohgb](http://tinyurl.com/ct2ohgb), follow us @TalentMgtMag, or join our Talent Management LinkedIn group.

"The trend is clearly towards multiple options for career development," Ingham said. "The very positive consequences of this are that employees have many more options available to them, and the employer has more opportunities to keep good employees engaged in the organization. The necessary consequence of this, however, is that the new career environment is becoming much more difficult to manage."

Over many years, Novartis has developed a detailed approach to career pathing called My Career. "It's a functional career path approach that includes clear role profiles, functional and leadership competencies, necessary experiences and proficiency levels, as well as maps that show how one might progress from role to role, and how roles compare to each other," Clawar said.

The company wraps all of this with guidance on coaching, development planning and career conversations, as well as a variety of other support tools. Clawar said

one great strength in this approach is its level of detail, but that is also its greatest weakness. "Regular updating and maintenance is required to keep this kind of approach current. We need it because employees value it, but we clearly need more."

Collaborative learning is one way to get to the "more." Novartis leverages social learning and networking tools so employees can find mentors globally to support their learning needs in a flexible manner. They also produce videos to share an inside view on different career options — such as what it's like to be a general manager — to help associates understand what's required in those roles. The company also created assessments that are available to associates via Web portals, and they use coaching, which Clawar said is "a powerful tool to enable managers and associates to really go deep and discuss what's important and meaningful in their career conversations."

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dously with engaging new employees in the company's culture. "Branding is everything," she said.

ESPN also uses storytelling during Rookie Camp to teach its employees about culture. Although ESPN is a large, global company today, it started as a seat-of-the-pants operation, with a cohort of young and inexperienced reporters broadcasting a sports-only cable channel when no one thought it was possible.

Vicki Ruiz, the company's senior director of learning and development, said ESPN's humble beginnings — as "the little engine that could," as she put it — is a big part of how its leaders behave today, though the company has grown significantly. ESPN's leaders tell new hires stories of its small beginnings to illustrate the mindset employees are expected to operate under.

Rookie Camp also includes a panel where employees who have been with the company for less than a year field questions from new hires. Ruiz said this is effective because it gives new hires access to insights from employees who are generally still learning the culture themselves.

New employees may not get a grip on company culture until they've spent considerable time on the job, but pre-hire social networks, online communities and branded new-hire orientation programs are a solid place to start.

When it comes to getting a handle on some of the finer aspects of office culture — those that may be more implicit — the onus lands on the front-line manager, said Bill Berman, managing director of leadership development consultancy Berman Leadership Development.

Aside from making sure employees are fully assimilated to the broader company culture, front-line managers need to communicate intra-office subcultures to new hires as well.

Further, Berman said front-line managers must take an enhanced role teaching culture when a company has multiple offices in different locations across the country or internationally. They can do this by walking around and actively engaging in culture-related conversations with team members.

He said dispersed offices in different parts of the U.S. or in other countries are also likely to have their own subcultures, and managers must make sure new employees are aware of these nuances in addition to any overarching cultural characteristics embraced by the company at large.

HR also needs to be aware of these nuances. "It's incumbent for HR to know those differences [in office subcultures] and be able to try and educate and inform — and, to some extent, inculcate people into that culture." TM

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As talent leaders strive for this level of career pathing excellence, three principles can help them.

**Encourage exploration.** Giving control of career pathing to individual employees constitutes a big shift in process for most companies, but one that employees desire and expect today. New social systems that help people manage additional complexity and explore their own paths is where things are headed, according to Ingham. "This means that the organization can dispense with the traditional chess master — who will find it increasingly difficult to manage things from the center given the complexity of careers today — and devolve management of people's careers to the people themselves," he said.

**Provide guidance.** People like to explore, but sometimes they need a little guidance. Think of it as companies providing a map, but employees providing the compass. "Many organizations are attempting to address the need for customized career pathing through detailed career management portals," Garr said.

She said these portals typically include assessments that help employees understand their current strengths, interests and motivations, and then allow them to match their specific characteristics to job profiles that contain that information as requirements to succeed in that role. Another way companies can provide guidance is by helping employees form peer connections so they can access people and resources in all sections of the company, be it through collaborative learning technology, social networking or something else. This lets them learn about other career paths that may be outside their function or responsibilities, and helps them find opportunities they may have been unaware of previously.

**Support personal passion.** Do people live to work, or work to live? "I don't think a path to the top means the same for people these days, and that's not just a Gen Y thing," Ingham said. He said the desire for hierarchical advancement is slowly being replaced by the search for meaning and achievement, which translates into people being more open to a horizontal career move.

Garr concurs. "Younger employees, regardless of generation, tend to be more idealistic and interested in exploring their passions and interests." This can lead people to seek a unique career path that lets them follow their passions and interests in pursuit of a more enriching and fulfilling life. When combined with supportive guidance and encouragement to explore, this can make a powerful process. TM

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