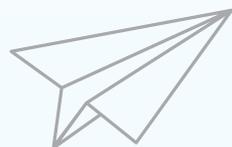
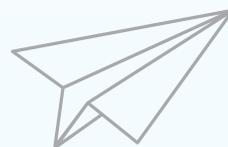
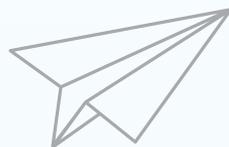


CAREER DEVELOPMENT'S (R)EVOLUTION

BY BEVERLY KAYE AND LINDY WILLIAMS

A combination of big, bold, sweeping changes and more subtle but significant shifts in the work, workplace, and expectations and needs of the individuals who make up that workplace have shaped and reshaped what the term *career development* means today. From its original role as a method of finding the right job, career development has evolved into a process for professional growth that encompasses the wide range of experiences that ultimately form an individual's life's work. Along the way, career development, with its power to maximize engagement, has taken center stage in the competition for talent and has become a C-suite agenda item.





Careers, and thus career development, are charting a new course.



The fluid and changing workplace demands a fresh look at what is meant by the term career.

Whether this transformation is viewed as a gradual evolution or a more disruptive revolution depends on your vantage point. If you've played a role inside the career development space during the past decade and have navigated some of the changes brought about by the trends outlined in the sidebar on page 47, you are more likely to use the term *revolution* to describe the experience. And even for those who see the changes as evolutionary, it's time to buckle up. Change isn't finished with the career development space.

What hasn't changed?

Three stakeholders emerged early as a foundational partnership that remains today at the core of the most successful organizational career development efforts. The partnership comprises the individuals navigating careers, the managers of those individuals, and the organizations in which they work. Stakeholders' roles, expectations, and responsibilities have evolved with the changes and shifts mentioned above and will likely continue to adjust and adapt. However, this trio remains essential to building and maintaining a development culture regardless of how small or large the effort.

The individual stakeholder is the central player in the partnership, bringing the energy, motivation, aspirations, and determination to the experience. Unlike 20th-century perceptions of careers as predictable and frequently prescriptive, there is greater acceptance today of the fact that every career is unique—as unique as the individual experiencing it. No two people will follow the same route in exactly the same way. This brings with it the complexity of providing career-focused development to the many while tailoring development experiences to each individual's needs and aspirations. That's not an easy task—and one that puts increasing pressure on the other two partners to deliver what's expected by today's careerists.

The second player in the partnership, the manager, matters now more than ever. Engagement survey results continue to show that the manager-employee relationship, when good, can make an enormous positive difference in how an employee perceives opportunities and engages with the work. The breakdown or absence of a good relationship can damage or destroy engagement and drive employees to seek careers elsewhere. As a result, more organizations are holding managers accountable for having career- and development-focused conversations on a regular basis and building relationships that stretch the managers' role to listen more than tell and to advocate more than advise.

Finally, the organization—led by senior leaders, talent development, and HR—is still responsible for providing access to the systems, processes, and tools that the other two partners rely on to build career experiences. Organizations that have been paying attention have come to realize that they can build career development systems that live over time and through change. It's also true that if attention wanes or focus is lost, even the most carefully designed processes will fail or fade away. Development professionals who discover the secrets to building something that lasts create cultures of growth and engagement.

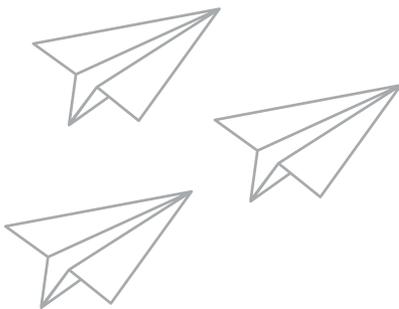
This stakeholder partnership emerged in the early years, continues to evolve as the roles are clarified, and remains a significant foundational element of effective and sustainable career development efforts.

What is changing?

The following four transformations are reframing career development and offer opportunities for talent development professionals.

Career development is a necessity now. No longer a side conversation, a discussion of why and how to enable career development has found its way onto C-suite agendas, with good reason. It's a bottom-line issue and, as report after report shows, an engagement and retention opportunity.

Employees who can't see a future within the organization will find a future elsewhere. The cost of losing talent has been calculated repeatedly, so that isn't new. What is new, however, is the recognition of how powerful a genuine effort to enable career growth can be in the engagement equation and the employee value proposition.



The reach of career development efforts has expanded beyond primarily targeting employees identified as high potentials. Development of that talent is still critical, but providing career development to the broader population is essential to maximizing performance and engagement. Forward-thinking organizations are using cost-effective techniques, creative technologies, improved career portals, communities of practice, and web-based delivery methods to provide development that is accessible and adaptable to individual needs and aspirations.

Organizations' futures may depend on their solutions and their ability to offer career development to everyone.

Career audiences are deeper and wider and sometimes invisible. Career audiences—people who influence the opportunities that come our way—have changed. Today's career audience is no longer an easily identified tidy little circle of individuals who may weigh in. The usual suspects are still there—immediate managers, teammates, direct customers and clients, and maybe a previous boss. But the audience has grown to include a constellation of players, some of whom an individual may not even know personally.

Social media, matrixed structures, and project-based work have produced broader networks and added multiple dimensions to the pool of people who potentially have input into how a person is seen, not just within the organization but also in the industry and possibly even in the work world, depending on the extent of the individual's exposure. Managing a brand has become essential to individuals maneuvering and thriving in this more open landscape of connections.

As the band of observers grows, individuals should place particular care on managing perceptions. Stories of ill-advised social media posts or a photograph or joke that affected a job opportunity illustrate how widely an individual's reputation is available and the effect it can have on a career. Learning how to manage this broader brand reach is central to managing a career today.

Organizations are acknowledging and leveraging the power of social media and proactively engaging employees in building and managing their reputations.

Career paths are transforming into patterns. Predictable career paths are rare these days. The definition of a career has changed. Career ladders lost rungs or disappeared. Pursuing one dream job risks frustration and disengagement if that job is downsized or outsourced.

Careers have moved away from prescriptive paths to more personalized sets of experiences as individuals today focus on balancing money and meaning when making next-step choices. Contingent workers move into and out of roles and organizations as work and assignments come and go. Careers today are a series of sprints versus a marathon, giving advantage to the agile, flexible careerist.

The fluid and changing workplace demands a fresh look at what is meant by the term career. Savvy talent developers are taking the lead in changing the organizational mindset to one that values and facilitates flexible, self-defined career patterns—

A View From 1983

In the 1983 *TD* article "Will Your Organization Be Doing Career Development in the Year 2000?" the authors identify five trends they predicted would significantly affect organizational career development in the coming years. Here's how those trends have played out in recent years.

A shift in age distribution of the working population has occurred as Millennials become the predominant workplace presence. Additionally, significant changes in the ethnic and racial makeup of the U.S. workforce and continuing globalization present a rich mix of cultures and life experiences and a new level of complexity as well as opportunity for organizational careers.

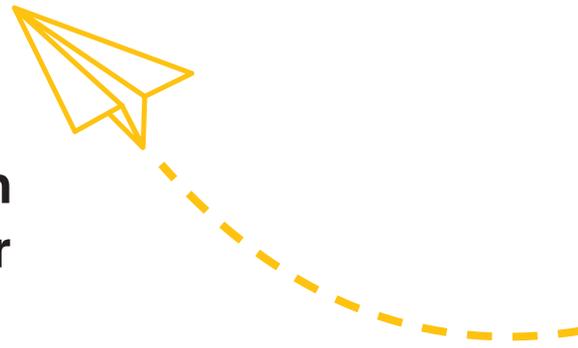
A slowing of the trend toward early retirement played out a bit differently than envisioned in 1983. Some workers have delayed retirement, while others have left organizational roles to become contractors or entrepreneurs following downsizing and layoffs. These individuals who by chance or by choice have remained in the workforce still have a desire and need for development at this new career stage.

An unprecedented boom in technology continues, at times defying description. Artificial intelligence presents the potential for the replacement of human workers in some roles. The amount of information accessible instantaneously has multiplied exponentially. Free university-level coursework, streaming expert presentations, and open source training provide seemingly unlimited options for learners challenged to select development resources.

A need for compensatory high touch to offset high-tech is even more important as individuals work virtually. Absent deliberate and careful attention, this lack of face-to-face, in-person communication can affect the quality and effectiveness of the manager-employee interchange that's essential to development and engagement.

A smashing of the organizational pyramid happened in some places through delayering. Even where a formal hierarchy remains intact, workers expect to reach across boundaries, communicate directly with levels above and below their roles, and be treated with respect and valued for their opinions more than ever before, offering a powerful vehicle for two-way mentoring and coaching.

So, 35 years later, it's safe to say that these trends have had a significant impact and will continue to create challenges and opportunities to provide meaningful career development.



Organizations' futures may depend on their solutions and their ability to offer career development to everyone.

traditional and not so traditional—and opens more doors for talent to choose to stay and grow. **Careers are built on capabilities and soft skills.** Expertise in a role, field, or profession always has been and always will be important. Add to that the fact that the ever-changing world of work has begun to stretch the scope of what someone needs to succeed in a career. A greater emphasis is now placed on soft skills such as emotional intelligence, curiosity, resilience, and creativity, which are now recognized as critical to staying ahead of the competition. These factors are more difficult to evaluate and measure; they're not finite skill sets on a mastery checklist. Instead, individuals must continue to build competence and capability in a constantly evolving mix of areas. And as the call to "do more with less" continues, capacity to take on more is tested repeatedly.

Basic skill sets are not enough anymore. Organizations are taking soft skills seriously. They are investing in building and creating learning experiences that provide opportunities to practice these skills and evaluation methods that ensure accountability. Talent development professionals are perfectly positioned to guide the identification, application, and measurement of these crucial abilities.

What is next?

The landscape of possibilities for talent development professionals specializing in career development is exciting. Opportunities to grow are being untangled from prescribed paths. Technology is opening more doors to learn in ways that tap into how learning happens and what makes it stick. There's more than just a seat at the table for talent development professionals; there is the potential to create cultures of continuous growth for individuals and the organizations they form. Making certain that what you build rests on a solid foundation requires focus on all three partners.

Individuals need the encouragement, resources, tools, and support to envision their futures. They don't need every possible new app or program, but they do need conversations with managers, coaches, or mentors. They need to take action, be open to learning, be willing to change behaviors, and be introspective enough to clarify their career needs, wants, and aspirations.

Managers need to know how and when to help employees navigate opportunities. In organizations where development resources are plentiful, managers who step in as curators and guides will assist in the selection of the best choices for learning experiences. Where resources are limited, managers who find creative learning methods that cost little or nothing will provide meaningful growth opportunities. Managers must be ready to identify talent and share it—even when it's painful.

Organizations own the messages and methods. The partnership will thrive when the organization integrates growth and development across core processes, instills accountability into the system for all three players, and celebrates those who keep the system alive.

Career development plays a pivotal role in the ecosystem of development-related processes within organizations. Career conversations and experiences that move a career forward add value throughout the life cycle of the employee experience, from recruiting to retirement.

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