

# CAREER PATHS: Mapping, Ladders and Lattices

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## Introduction

Career paths can take many forms, twists and turns. There is no one certain path to excellence in any profession or sub-discipline. Professional schools, trade schools and the school-of-hard-knocks are all part of the bricks that pave the path to career success.

Human assets drive business success. The stronger our people, the stronger our organizations. "It is the dedication, motivation, knowledge and skill sets of individuals that make a tremendous difference in the organization."<sup>1</sup> Marilu Goodyear et als. "Leaders must address the challenges confronting complex structures and processes if they want to stay in business."<sup>2</sup> Bryan and Joyce. Today, more than ever, organizations and careers are being buffeted by economic pain. Now faced with a failing economy, if expediency rules the workplace, career paths will be derailed.

## Issues

What should organizations and workers do to achieve organizational success and personal achievement? How do you guide human capital into career paths to meet both organizational expectations and individual aspirations? How do you go about delineating key professions and trades at your company? And are they visible to all?

## Customizing Careers

Career customization moves companies away from the "one-size-fits-all" notion of career progression toward multiple career paths - "each designed and executed through continual collaboration between employee and employer. The customized, undulating paths require ongoing collaboration between an organization as a whole, the manager, and the employee. [Each participant] subscribes to a culture that embraces career options – options that fit the needs of the business to the needs of the individual today and over time."<sup>3</sup> Cathleen Benko and Anne Weisberg.

Professionals want to see career paths. They want options. 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 – work hard, slow down, work virtually, or work part time. Diverse career needs require diverse career paths.

Cathleen Benko and Anne Weisberg assigned a fixed set of options along “four career dimensions” that provide a framework to assess and manage career paths. In their book, *Mass Career Customization*, they advocate that employees build their own careers by choosing the options within each of “four career dimensions” that most closely matches each individual’s career goals, while considering life needs along with the needs of the business at any point in time. Benko and Weisberg list the “four career options” as: (1) “Pace,” – options relating to the rate of career progression, (2) “Workload,” – options relating to the quantity of work output, (3) “Location/Schedule,” – options of when and where to work, and (4) “Role,” – options in position and responsibility. The “four career dimensions” not only set the rates of change in careers to the needs of the individual and organization, but also are fair and include everyone in the organization. They shape career paths within a lattice network, offer transparency and a fresh view.<sup>4</sup> Cathleen Benko and Anne Weisberg.

### **Traditional Career Path**

From the beginning of time, most people’s careers were handed down from father to son and from mother to daughter. Parents possessed with the skills and knowledge of a profession or trade acted as mentors - and the children were apprentices. Eventually, the children became parents, which sustained the ongoing cycle of family trades, professions and businesses. During the Renaissance, craftspeople found others, unrelated and often in their early teens, took them under their wing, trained them, and helped build skills. The Industrial Revolution brought people new career opportunities. New trades and businesses supported industry. Money earned could be spent on professional and trade school education. Workers transferred knowledge and innovation. Lectures and study tours commonly expanded career opportunities. Nonetheless, the fate of workers was tied to organizations and many workers identified with their jobs rather than a trade or a profession. People managed without necessarily mastering a profession or trade. In a sense, the Industrial Revolution produced a new kind of semi- skilled worker - a “jobber.”

### **Job Centered Career Path – Semi-Skilled Workers**

Semi-skilled workers are at risk today. “Jobbers” move from job to job, company to company, without serious attention to building strong skill sets in one or more professions or trades. They are the first to be replaced by changing technology, outsourcing, failing global economy, disappearing businesses, reductions in workforce, or automation.

Unfortunately, much of our current employment tools center on jobs. We have developed job mentality search systems through company job postings, Jobs.com, Monster.com, Careerbuilder, etc. The majority of organizations still base compensation systems on jobs rather than mastery of practices in a profession or trade. Taking a job is simply a way to discover the kind of work that suits your needs, talents, and skills. Keeping a job requires learning and mastery of one or more professional areas that is valued in your organization or industry.

### **Single Function Career Path – SMEs**

Some people remain in the same profession/functional area for their careers – engineering, information technology, immunology, etc. They may move between companies, business areas, and product lines, but find their fulfillment in building increased expertise in one functional area. Most organizations refer to them as individual contributors or in the case of very experienced professionals, “Subject Matter Experts” (SMEs).

Many careerists follow their passion or love of a profession. They become SMEs within their discipline/sub-discipline. Employees engaged in passion-centered career paths or profession-centered career paths can move from SMEs to pursue cross-functional paths.

### **Cross-Functional Career Path**

In a cross-functional career path, careerists have the ability to move between two or more functional areas in their careers. In some cases, they can dip into another functional area briefly to broaden their understanding of a related function and then return to their area. In other cases, individuals actually move from one functional area into another and craft their future career moves from that area to another.

Transparency is important to guide careerists to other areas. They must see both the overall system and the different options that other professionals have followed.

### **Multi-Functional Career Path – Generalists**

Millions of workers choose to be generalists. Their career paths span two or more functional areas (marketing, sales, customer service, management, biology, biotechnology, etc.). People move from one field to another, either in the same industry or organization or in others in order to develop breadth, depth and experience. Some discover the functional area in their field of concentration is no longer of interest to them and they move into different functional areas to discover a niche of greater interest. Others recognize that there are very few opportunities in a particular profession, but they enjoy working in their organization. They move from profession to profession within the organization. Jumping from one open position to another may lead to becoming a successful generalist, but a generalist will never master any profession or trade.

Many companies and individuals create cross-functional career paths by moving new employees from one functional area to another in order to prepare them for management. The prevalent philosophy is that managers need not specialize in a specific functional area to become strong general managers. More often than not, the best managers are respected for their knowledge and mastery of one or more core professions that are essential to their organization.

### **Profession-Centered Career Path – Specialists**

At MasteryWorks, we believe that choosing a profession or trade is the most important career decision that people will make. Time and again, we find that excellence in the professions and the trades is fundamental and enduring. Specialists follow professionally centered career paths that define their career success in terms of growth, learning, and development in one profession or trade. In the early years, they typically intern and apprentice. They seek mentors and coaches for feedback and fellowship. Their loyalty is to learning and increasing the depth and breadth of their mastery. They raise the bar and they are the innovators and the problem solvers.

### **Purpose-Centered Career Path**

Many seasoned professionals want to stay in their company and contribute their expertise to help solve problems and address continuing concerns. They want to follow a purpose centered career path to innovate and resolve critical issues facing their organization and industry. For example, **Lockheed Martin Company** lists current projects that attract key talent to harness a sense of purpose that aligns individual goals with organizational projects.

## Different Ways to Show Career Paths

In a recent organizational study, we asked over 300 participants to track their own career paths. We asked how they moved into their current sub-discipline and where they hoped/expected to move if they left the sub-discipline. The results confirmed that people come from a variety of traditional and untraditional places to a specific position and also move on to a wide variety of positions. There is no longer one career path for people doing similar work. Therefore, it's important that organizations display the diversity of movement on their career website.

Human Resource professional can identify, catalogue and display all jobs either in the professions or trades as they exist. The number of core professions and trades can be surprisingly small. For example, we found only 12 to 15 core professions in an organization of over 350,000 workers. In another instance, when we consulted for The American Red Cross, the largest volunteer organization in the world that had a little over three million paid and volunteer staff, we found only twenty-six distinct professions and trades.

By designing organizational maps and seeing the entire system, managers and individuals can design Functional and Multi-Functional Career Paths.

For example, **Genentech** carefully catalogued all the scientific disciplines/sub-disciplines so that a reader can appreciate the breadth of the sixteen scientific options possible within the organization. The biographies of key scientists and researchers, who span different areas and levels of the organization are readily available. Each sets forth (1) the reasons they joined Genentech; (2) the of research projects they are currently pursuing; (3) their motivation and inspiration; and (4) the specific prospects they seek to recruit into research projects. Each bio contains education/background of the scientist as well as links to top scientific papers. The design of this website displays the entire system (a list of 16 scientific disciplines), showing a variety of ways of moving in each sub-discipline that are both personal and professional.

See: <http://www.gene.com/gene/research/sci-profiles/aatech/wong/profile.html>

See: <http://www.gene.com/gene/research/sci-profiles/immun/chan/profile.html>

See: <http://www.gene.com/gene/research/sci-profiles/>

**Johnson and Johnson** provides a visual map that displays the entire knowledge system, embracing ten functional areas. With the system directly in front of careerists, the choice of a functional area is placed within the context of a larger system. Each profile is sufficiently detailed to search career histories of persons as well as brief bios. By choosing any of the radial buttons, one can find the path each followed. The display provides important information to careerists in a succinct and consistent framework.

See [http://careers.jnj.com/careers/global/modules/career\\_profiles/kimberlin/main.htm](http://careers.jnj.com/careers/global/modules/career_profiles/kimberlin/main.htm)

## Modern Career Paths

Modern organizations have long been plagued by the notion that career paths are linked between compensation and positional level in the hierarchy. Many people simply want to “move up” in order to increase their compensation. Once they reached a career summit, there were no further compensation opportunities within their profession or discipline. This enigma frequently required strong technical people to move over into the ranks of management in order to climb the compensation ladder. Unfortunately for both the organization and the individual, skill and ability in one or more professions or sub-disciplines is not the criteria of whether someone should move into management. *Smart career paths do not tie top compensation levels solely to a management track.* The unnecessary tie of positional level with compensation has continued to be a critical factor in designing smart career paths.

## Lattice or Ladder

Ann M. Thayer, in an article entitled, “*Dual Career Ladders*” writes: “In the chemical and pharmaceutical industries, dual career ladders have been in place for at least 15 to 20 years, and the approach has evolved and gathered support with time. Many employers initially created ladders for technical or research employees, and some still use them only in this area. Many companies have put ladders in other functions, such as engineering, manufacturing, finance, human resources, legal, and marketing areas. This approach not only provides for employee growth in different functional areas, but also allows employers to adjust pay scales independently to be competitive with the broader market for different jobs.”

“Ladders are often found in organizations where research is highly visible or strategically important,” explains James R. Bowers, vice president for chemical industry consulting at the Hay Group, a Philadelphia-based human resources consulting firm. In such companies, “part of the strategy will be to try to give opportunities on two different career paths, both of which can lead ultimately to high success. The dual approach says that you can move up the scientific track and be paid at an equivalent level to a supervisor or a manager by being a really excellent scientist and bringing value through innovation, ideas, and scientific leadership. In a different kind of way, it’s a manager of ideas, technology, or intellectual capital rather than a manager of people with the administrative activities typically associated with [management].”

Thayer writes that “although the exact details and mechanics vary from company to company, career ladders have some common features. Employees [are placed] on salary grades or on “rungs” equivalent to their colleagues on another ladder. Companies also offer similar reward possibilities such as stock options, bonuses, and profit-sharing incentives. Most ladders usually are open to employees at all degree levels. Realistically, most ladders--technical, professional, or management--are best viewed as pyramids, because the number of positions decreases as the levels increase. At some companies, the top technical level may be as high as a vice president. Others’ ladders run to upper-level technical positions that are equivalent to a director or general manager. Ladders are more successful, say consultants, when senior technical staff report to senior, rather than lower-level, managers. Many technology-based companies have chief technical officers or senior vice presidents for R&D, but these jobs generally are on the management ladder.”

In her article, Anne Thayer concludes, “Companies now give professionals more administrative responsibilities as well as freedom to select research projects and requiring them to play active and strategic roles. However, human resources managers note that the choices are not entirely in an employee’s hands, and companies will work to identify roles for an individual before making a commitment. Options to alter career paths or jump ladders depend on interest, ability, performance, and job needs within a company.”<sup>5</sup> Anne M. Thayer.

## Dual Career Paths Help Reduce Turnover

Contributor to *IT World Canada*, Barbara Cole-Gomolski points to several examples where dual career paths have helped reduce turnover rates in IT organizations. At **AlliedSignal Inc.** in Morristown, New Jersey, the turnover rate for the top technical performers traditionally ranged around 25 per cent. “[Technical] people were leaving because they felt they had nowhere to go unless they went into management,” said Julian Kaufmann, corporate director for IT human resources. But since the company rolled out a dual career system last summer, “we haven’t lost any top talent,” he said. The dual career track “gives me a sense of control over my own destiny,” said Tom LaBonte, lead information systems analyst at AlliedSignal. As a 15-year company veteran who has had various job titles, “I can move into the more technical area, or I can go out and work more with customers [in the business unit],” he said.

At **Sears Roebuck and Co.** in Hoffman Estates, Ill., the IT department has introduced a dual career path package that will allow a technician to rise all the way to the level of company officer. "We know what motivates technical people is the work that they do and being recognized for it," said Pam Cox, Sears' workplace transformation manager. In addition to improving retention, dual career paths are being driven by a need to shore up certain IT competencies. Setting up dual career paths often involves reclassifying all IT jobs and introducing new training programs.<sup>6</sup> Barbara Cole-Gomolski.

## Career Choices – Being at the Right Place at the Right Time

**CAREER RISK™ Assessment - Leading Career Indicators®.** Being in the "right place at the right time" is critical. We have developed a system to help you to discover the importance and interrelationship of career choices – industry, organization, profession and position by answering 40 questions. Areas of viability and risk will show up in the profile.

### For Individuals

- A powerful appreciation of the interaction of one's industry, organization, profession and position in current and future career choices.
- Criteria for determining if the current work and environment is vital for the future.
- Recommended actions for enhancing career vitality.
- Criteria to guide them in any "job search" activity – internally or externally.

### For Managers

- A way for assessing positions that might be "at risk."
- Coaching ideas – especially in a downsizing or merging culture.
- Clarity on the importance and interrelationship of the entire system of work – industry, organization, profession and positions.
- See: [http://www.masteryworks.com/newsite/assessments/assess\\_cra.htm](http://www.masteryworks.com/newsite/assessments/assess_cra.htm)

## Assess Your Goals – OPTIONSMART™ Assessment

Show employees how to align their aspirations with organization needs. Moving up may not always be the best nor possible career option. Do your employees know there are **six development options**? This forty- eight question assessment will give your employees multiple options for aligning their aspirations with the needs of your organization. The Online version includes a Personal Report with the results and recommendations for taking action.

See: [http://www.masteryworks.com/newsite/assessments/assess\\_os.htm](http://www.masteryworks.com/newsite/assessments/assess_os.htm)

## Summary

If there is anything that is evident from our research across numerous organizations, it is that *there is no one path to excellence in any profession or sub-discipline*. As we move globally from a hierarchical to a networked talent system, from a growing economy into recession, the old pyramidal thinking and promotional approaches no longer work. Individuals must continue to customize their career paths to fit their unique life and professional needs. Dynamic work is at the intersection of the changing knowledge requirements and changing talent needs of the organization. More importantly than ever, career paths must be co-authored and customized between the individual, the organization and the manager to align aspirations of the individual with the needs of the business.

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5. Anne M. Thayer, "Dual career Ladders, Dual Paths for R&D and Management Offer Opportunities for Career Growth and for Companies to Meet Their Staffing Needs," CENEAR 76 44 1-80, Volume 76, Number 44, November 2, 1998.
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**About the Author** — Caela Farren, Ph.D., is President of MasteryWorks, Inc. in Falls Church, VA. She has been a consultant, entrepreneur, and educator for over 30 years, Caela has worked with hundreds of thousands of people worldwide to get them on their mastery path. Caela's practice and company builds strong links between changing trends in industries, changing strategies of organizations and the talents and aspirations of individuals. People who work with her company discover their passion, their mastery path, and bring renewed contribution and high performance to their organizations.

Caela is known internationally for her expertise in developing talent management products and services. Her solutions are user-friendly systems that serve the needs of both organizations and individuals. She is frequently quoted in the media regarding her thoughts and advice on changing careers and work patterns in the nation. Hundreds of organizations have implemented talent management solutions from MasteryWorks, Inc. — consulting, workshops, assessment instruments and web-based talent management portals.

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