

## Aligning Career Paths. Executive Excellence, 20, No. 4, 9-10.

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One of the most salient career paradigm shifts has been the change from job security to employability security. Today, the engagement and retention of high potential talent is a competitive advantage to all organizations. What do we know about engagement and its relationship to productivity and retention? Several recent studies provide some answers to this question.

For example, Aon Consulting reported in a recent research study of about 1,800 workers that employee commitment is declining in every industry, age group, income group and job classification. The Gallup organization also recently reported evidence of declining employee engagement in a major survey that found only 26 percent of employees consider themselves "actively engaged" in their work.

A change in the psychological contract with employees over the last few years has contributed to a set of critical paradigms shifts about careering in the US. The old sense of job security has given way to the concept of "employability security" where developing "just in time competencies" results in the ability to be competitive in a global market place. In the "old" paradigm employees expected to be with companies for long periods of time (job jumping was typically seen as a sign of instability, immaturity or loyalty) and an expectation of rising responsibilities and salary/benefits. Today's "IPOD generation" employees have typically experienced mergers, acquisitions, bankruptcy, extensive downsizing and failures resulting in a focus on continuous relearning, development and work/family balance.

Perceptions of stress at work are quite high with several studies suggesting 40 % to 60% of all employees rate their jobs as being stress or extremely stressful with impact on family balance and health. In a recent poll by US based TrueCareers, more than 70% of workers do not think there is a healthy balance between work and family lives. More than 50% of the 1,626 were exploring new career opportunities because of the inability to manage both work and family stressors.

No doubt, this helps to explain why some professional women have chosen to "stop out" from professional careers after a large investment in formal education and training much to the display of their employers. Employers of choice today understand these changing career paradigm shifts and have developed programs, benefits and cultural change to enhance the commitment and retention of its talent.

## Workforce 2010: Changing Career Paradigms

### OLD PARADIGMS

- Job Security
- Longitudinal Career Paths
- Job/Person Fit
- Organizational Loyalty
- Career Success
- Academic Degree
- Position/Title
- Full-Time Employment
- Retirement
- Single Jobs/Careers
- Change in jobs based on fear
- Promotion tenure based

### NEW PARADIGMS

- Employability Security
- Alternate Career Paths
- Person/Organization Fit
- Job/Task Loyalty
- Work/Family Balance
- Continuous Relearning
- Competencies/Development
- Contract Employment
- Career Sabbaticals
- Multiple Jobs/Careers
- Change in jobs based on growth
- Promotion performance based

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One of the most important paradigm shifts has been the one from longitudinal career paths to those of alternate career paths. Talent today, given an opportunity, will not always elect to continue moving up the organizational ladder but will attempt to express his/her interests, values and motives within organizational cultures to maximize job satisfaction.

You have seen it happen in every organization--high performing independent contributors or specialists are promoted into leadership roles with disappointing performance. To maximize job satisfaction and cultivate retention, organizations should take steps to identify and align the career path preferences of their internal talent. These career path preferences are based on stable clusters of interests, values and motives that underlie each employee. These career path preferences are highly predictive of job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Career research has consistently shown that some individuals are most stimulated and challenged by staying specialized and remaining in one occupational or job area for most of his/her professional life; other individuals prefer variety, risk and challenge, or starting/owning one's own business that typically shape frequent entrepreneurial opportunities.

Other individuals want to move up the corporate ladder with greater opportunities to lead individuals, teams and organizations; and some individuals prefer to manage and lead increasingly more complex projects, rather than, people (e.g., program or project management). Effective alignment of an employee's preferred career path preferences will result in increased satisfaction, productivity and retention.

## Understanding the Four Career Path Preferences

**MANAGERIAL** -- This career path preference is best characterized by those interested in continually moving vertically up the organizational ladder into traditional supervisory and managerial positions with increasing spans of control, responsibility, power, and authority.

Typical career anchors and motives of these individuals include power, influence, leadership, control, task accomplishment, status, managerial competence, and directing others. Appropriate organizational rewards for these individuals might include: upward mobility, promotion, special perks, titles, and organizational symbols of success (e.g., profit sharing incentive plans, company car, stock options, financial planning, expense account, club memberships, etc.).

**SPECIALIST/INDEPENDENT CONTRIBUTOR** -- This career path preference is best characterized by those interested in remaining in one career field or profession for much of their working life. Along the way, these specialists are able to highly refine their technical knowledge, skills and abilities. These individuals are less interested in moving up as they are in becoming the expert and having autonomy to do things their way.

Typical career anchors and motives of these individuals include technical and functional competence, expertise, skill mastery, service to others, independence, affiliation and security. Appropriate organizational rewards for these individuals might include: job enrichment, continuing education, membership in professional associations, recognition, motivational programs, organizational benefits, sabbaticals, tenure and job security.

**ENTREPRENEURIAL** -- This career path preference is best characterized by those interested in rapid job, career, and occupational changes over short periods of time. These individuals enjoy working on diverse projects, tasks, assignments, and business ventures with measurable and visible outcomes.

Typical career anchors and motives of these individuals include: entrepreneurship, achievement, autonomy, variety, risk, challenge, change, freedom from organizational constraints, flexibility, creativity and diversity. Appropriate organizational rewards for these individuals might include flexible schedules, short-term projects, independent contracts, consulting assignments, start-up operations, job sharing, and bonuses.

**GENERALIST** -- This career path preference is best characterized by those who gradually change jobs and career over time but utilize the foundation of previously acquired skills, knowledge and abilities. These generalists generally move either laterally or upwards increasing their breadth of knowledge and experience along the way. Individuals who follow this career path tend to prefer new challenges and assignments that will enable them to grow and develop professionally. This career path preference is particularly well suited for project and program management assignments within organizations.

Typical career anchors and motives of these individuals include professional growth and personal development, learning, coaching, developing others, and innovation. Appropriate organizational rewards for these individuals might include cross training, job rotation, project management, tuition and educational reimbursement and coaching and mentorship assignments.

## **Conclusion**

Organizations need to identify and create career opportunities for each of these four distinct career path preferences. Effective alignment of an employee's preferred path preferences with internal career opportunities will result in increased satisfaction, productivity and retention of talent.

One assessment that might be considered to measure employee's current and preferred career path preference is the Career Profile Inventory published by Consultingtools Inc. (<http://www.consultingtoolsusa.com/products/CPI/index.asp>).

The Career Profile Inventory provides one way to identify and measure the career path preference of an employee to maximize his/her satisfaction. Because job satisfaction is a strong predictor of turnover, employers today need to understand that having multiple career paths will help facilitate retaining high potential employees.