



# TAKE FLIGHT

A one-dimensional leadership career stream is insufficient to meet the needs of staff and the organisation. Don't pigeonhole employees – let them spread their wings

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by ADRIAN SMITH

Many large organisations claim to have an open career structure that encourages staff to take advantage of the various career opportunities that exist across the organisation, however the reality is that people do get pigeonholed into particular areas or functions. While this suits many staff, equally many others are frustrated by the apparent inability to move, to exploit their skills, to take on new challenges and to advance their careers to technical excellence or leadership levels. There is a way that organisations can genuinely break the bonds and create an environment that embraces linear and non-linear career pathways.

In their seminal management book *The Leadership Pipeline*, Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter and James Noel present a model for identifying future leaders, assessing their

competence, planning their development and measuring the results. They talk about the journey from managing self to managing others and eventually to group and enterprise level management.

In the most recent edition they also devote considerable time to defining the role of the functional manager and outlining the functional career passage, in fact saying the functional offshoot is one most people will follow. In their minds there is no doubt that a one-dimensional leadership career stream is insufficient to meet the needs of staff and the organisation.

This seems to be a no-brainer, but for many organisations the actual falls far short of the ideal, and despite best intentions they limit personal and therefore organisational excellence as they do not create a variety of career and leadership opportunities for staff, nor fully develop and then utilise their

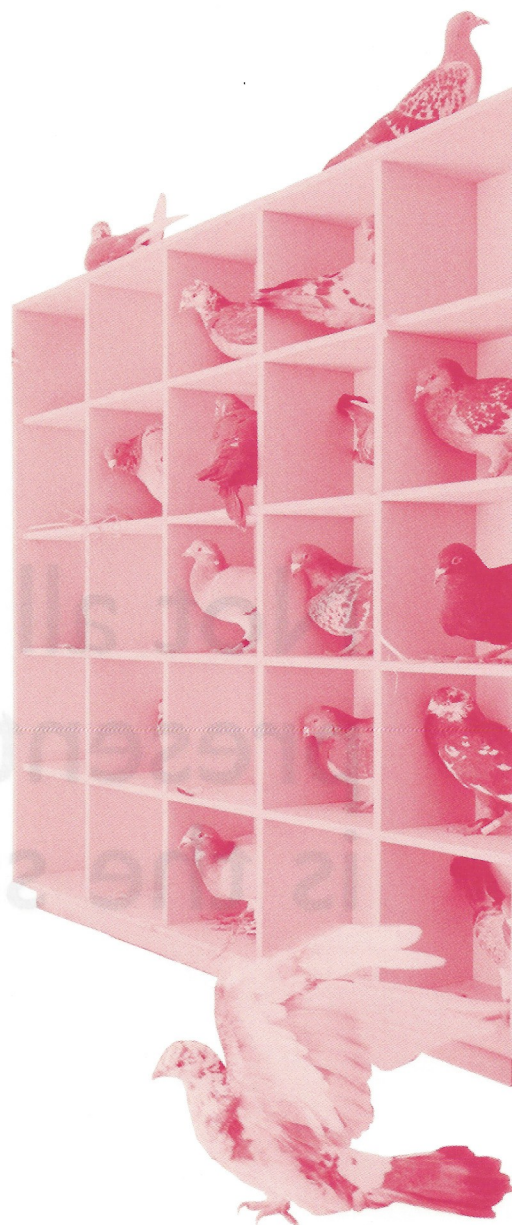
skills, or keep them motivated and engaged with the organisation and their jobs.

## THE PROBLEM WITH TRADITION

One of our clients at Talent Mondial Australia is a professional services firm with global capability in strategic consulting, engineering and project delivery. It employs a range of highly technically skilled staff, but has always been challenged in workforce planning, particularly in relation to depth and location of technical skills, recruitment attraction and staff retention, and in identifying and engaging future technical and business leaders.

It has also been challenged in getting different areas to work together, creating an organisational rather than sectional mindset, and a global way of working.

Its traditional linear career streams (see chart 1) give some clear insights into the problems faced, in particular in the way staff





are kept within a very tight discipline, with limited opportunity to pursue different career steps and no opportunity once they have left to come back to their core skills levels.

This structure was useful in promoting depth of technical knowledge and skills to the individual staff member, however this was not translating into individual motivation and engagement beyond personal loyalty to the small teams or sections the employees were working in. Further, the structure significantly limited the potential for career growth for those who chose the project management and business development streams.

Also, the career paths as shown forced staff who wished to further grow and develop their careers onto the very crowded business leadership path, regardless of their personal desires and preferences, much less their skill sets. Clearly this does not suit many people nor match their career preferences, and in reality does not ensure strong leadership skill sets.

This structure was also particularly challenging for their Gen X and Gen Y staff. Research indicates, and our clients' experience confirmed, that they are much less interested in leadership roles and more interested in challenging tasks and roles that drive job satisfaction and career growth.

The linear career structure the organisation had was constraining the pursuit of job variety, personal growth and challenging projects for this important part of their workforce. Also, it was certainly doing little to support retention and attraction strategies in an industry with significant skills shortages in Australia and their other markets.

But what does this mean for the individual? For example, Margie Ross, a qualified engineer, worked for our client, and like many of her peers she chose a business leadership pathway as the only real way to further her career. This moved her away from her passion in applying her engineering technical skills and experience into a business and people leadership role that did not suit her needs or match her skills.

It's no surprise that she left the organisation, albeit reluctantly. Ross is one of thousands of professionals each year who leave organisations where their needs are not met and capabilities not exploited.

## NON-LINEAR OPPORTUNITIES

Consider the same organisation with no barriers to non-linear moves (see chart 2). Immediately it is clear that a range of opportunities opens up for the individual that will provide the appropriate challenges to engage them. It also demonstrates the capacity to move from and back to a particular discipline, and removes any career limitations to the business development and project management streams.

The black lines in this chart represent a sample of non-linear career opportunities that can mean a person progresses into and out of the major business streams while constantly developing their skills and taking on new and challenging work. Also, these career maps can apply within business streams, for example consulting services, which have a number of separate, but often related and overlapping, practice lines.

If Ross was still around she would understand that under this model she could really exploit her engineering and project delivery skills, for example by spending some time in project management, or working in business management as a client manager, or achiev-

ing engineering excellence in one or more of the practice lines in consulting services.

Unfortunately, Ross is now adding value to the client's opposition at a time when the war for talent in professional services and engineering industries has never been higher. Our client does now however have a unique selling point as part of their attraction and retention strategies that may mean Ross comes back to a place she was very happy at in every other way.

## HOW DO YOU DO IT?

This all sounds well and good, but the reality is that it takes a lot of work and a very structured approach by the leadership group to achieve this. One method is to establish for all major roles a skills and capabilities matrix, which outlines the business experience, functional knowledge and the behaviours or capabilities required to be highly effective in a particular role or series of roles. Once established, this matrix is a very useful tool for individuals (and their managers) in their personal career planning. In conjunction with some form of measurement tool, often a self evaluation tool, it specifically highlights areas of immediate fit and areas requiring new or enhanced skills to meet the requirements of the job the person aspires to.

The matrix identifies the skills required at each level of the major disciplines in the group. The skills are further defined in a competency framework, which incorporates into each competency the traditional behavioural definitions and examples of positive behaviours, but also the business knowledge and experience, and the personal attributes that support this capability.

The matrix can also underpin an integrated human resources system, not only for personal career planning but also for workforce planning, talent and succession management, performance management, recruitment and learning and development.

The table (see page 43) is an example of how an employee of our client can map from their current role, for example as a principal consultant, what is needed to move to a more senior role as manager within consulting services and also what they need to do to make a move to a role

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in, say, business development or project management.

The matrix can also be constructed in such a way as to assist with issues around requisite experience and functional knowledge for the role that differentiate 'Fit to Start' from 'Fit for Job' and which facilitate transition to 'Fit for Job' as quickly as possible.

### WHY SHOULD YOU BOTHER?

Response to this approach from HR leaders and line managers in our client organisation has been overwhelmingly positive, with a strong desire to see it take life in practical applications that assist career discussions and performance discussions. We are working with the organisation on the next phase of this program, which is to take these building blocks and develop self-managed online self-evaluation and manager evaluation tools to assist in career planning and personal development.

This is an exciting initiative, which in conjunction with the development of integrated recruitment tools and L&D programs is an important part of their attraction, retention and organisational development strategies, and which will facilitate best practice in an industry not particularly known for leadership in people and leadership development, and maximisation of career opportunities for staff and prospective employees.

With this in mind our observation is that in establishing linear and non-linear career opportunities the organisation is:

- Driving higher retention levels of high potential and talented staff and managers
- Ensuring higher engagement from technical/professional/support staff through recognition of the value of their skills and improved career pathways
- Ensuring it has the capability and skills (leadership, technical and functional) available to meet future needs
- Developing more focused skills statements, leading to better skills gaps identification facilitating the development of strategies to develop or recruit to fill the gaps
- Ensuring greater facilitation of focused training courses on real development (leadership and functional) needs
- Establishing a broad range of skills, experiences and perspectives within individuals that sets them up to take on broader leadership functions.

While we clearly advocate transition from one-dimensional career paths to linear and non-linear career pathing – a word of warning. The major component of work is often in establishing these tools, HR leaders and people leaders must ensure that they don't cut »

CHART 1 TRADITIONAL LINEAR CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

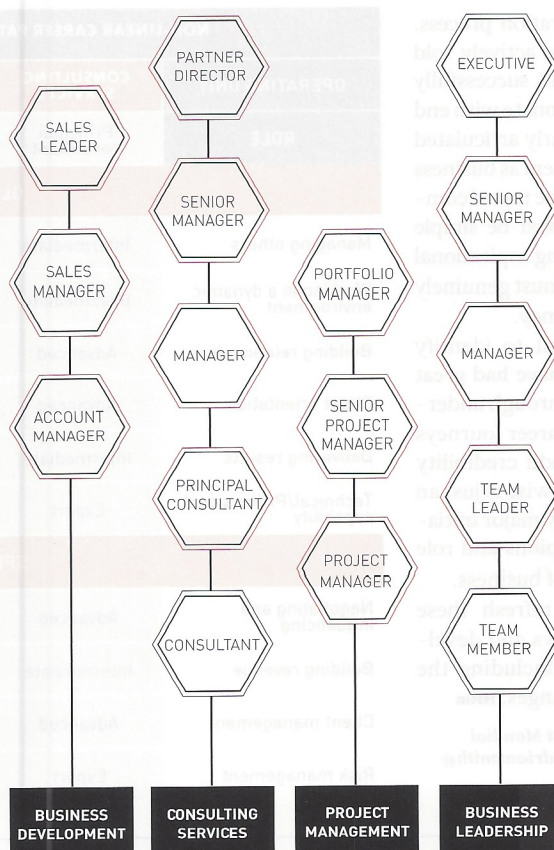
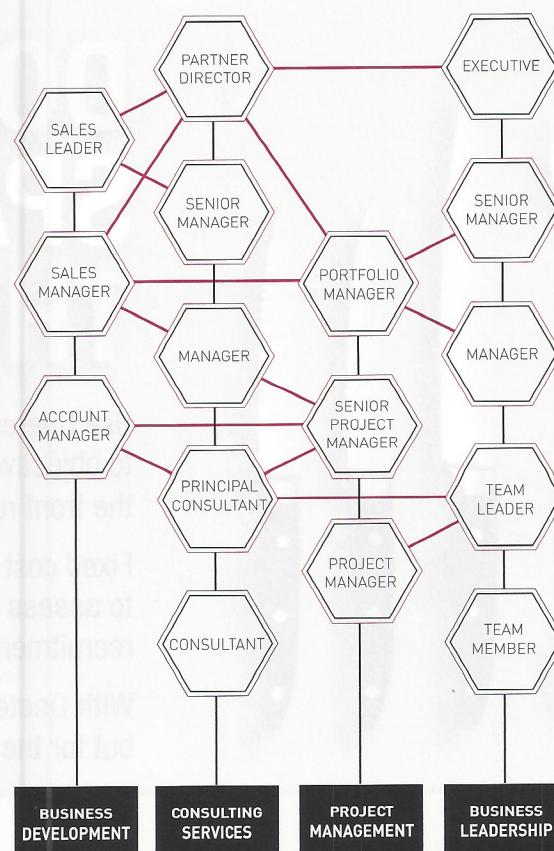


CHART 2 NON-LINEAR CAREER OPPORTUNITIES





short the education and integration process. These matrix concepts must be actively sold into the organisation. To do this successfully the concepts and tools must resonate with end users, and have strong and clearly articulated benefits for them in adopting them as business tools. Further, they must pass the test of common sense with users, they must be simple and transparent while remaining aspirational and forward looking, and they must genuinely help people on their career journey.

It will be critically important to identify staff in the organisation who have had great personal and business success through undertaking their own non-linear career journeys as these are the people who add credibility and achievability to what otherwise is just an interesting concept. As with any major initiative it is critical to have champions and role models from the various lines of business.

Be prepared to constantly refresh these tools as your organisation grows and develops and as the marketplace (including the labour market) evolves and changes. **HRm**

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**TABLE 1 NON-LINEAR CAREER PATHWAYS – SAMPLE SKILLS AND CAPABILITY MATRIX**

OPERATING UNIT	CONSULTING SERVICES	CONSULTING SERVICES	BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT	PROJECT MANAGEMENT
ROLE	Principal consultant	Manager	Account manager	Project manager
GLOBAL CAPABILITIES				
Managing others	Intermediate	Advanced	Foundation	Advanced
Working in a dynamic environment	Intermediate	Advanced	Intermediate	Advanced
Building relationships	Advanced	Advanced	Expert	Advanced
Client orientation	Advanced	Advanced	Expert	Advanced
Delivering results	Intermediate	Advanced	Foundation	Intermediate
Technical/Professional capability	Expert	Expert	Intermediate	Expert
SPECIAL CAPABILITIES				
Negotiating and influencing	Advanced	Advanced	Expert	Expert
Building revenue	Intermediate	Advanced	Expert	Not required
Client management	Advanced	Advanced	Expert	Expert
Risk management	Expert	Expert	Not required	Expert



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