



Career Development Pathways

A template for building visible career pathways

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Creating transparent career pathways isn't just good for employees, it's good for business

When employees can clearly see what their career options are and how to get there, they understand their choices better, feel more motivated, and find it easier to set goals. All of this leads to better career growth and job satisfaction. [1][2][4]

The evidence is clear

Research shows that personal factors like motivation and confidence work hand-in-hand with workplace factors like having clear career paths and good support to help people advance in their careers. The combination is even more powerful than either one alone. [6][7]

The bottom line

- Creating transparent career pathways reduces turnover costs, increases productivity, and helps you retain your best talent. [2][3][13]
- 70% of employees report increased engagement when clear career pathways are present [3]
- Organisations with visible career frameworks see higher retention and productivity [2][3]
- Clear progression criteria reduce bias and increase fairness in promotion decisions [13][14]

A career pathway does three things for the employee:

- **It will show them what skills they need** to nurture and how those skills come to life in different roles
- **It defines success**, clarifying what "good" looks like at each role level, empowering them to take ownership of their development
- **It will make pathways visible**, by setting out what progression can look like across the organisation



A career pathway will do three things for the employee



1. Describe the skills

For an employee to understand **what matters for success**, they need to understand the skills that are required to be successful.

What the organisation needs to do:

Create a **Skills Framework** that identifies 5-7 core skill areas that matter across all roles. These can be both technical and transferable skills, and they become the lens through which employees understand their performance and growth.

Examples / considerations:

Skills categories might include

- Leadership
- Communication
- Technical/Functional expertise
- Collaboration
- Problem-solving



2. Define success

For an employee to know **what "good" looks like at each level**, they need the expectations spelled out clearly.

Create a **Competency Framework** which describes what the expectations are at each role level across each skill area. The key is being specific about what changes as someone grows. It's not just "does more" but "does different." Higher levels typically show greater scope of impact, more complexity in problems solved, less supervision and more influence.

Provide 2-3 concrete examples of what a skill looks like in practice. Instead of "communicates well", write "presents quarterly results to non-technical stakeholders in a way they can act on."



3. Clarify the pathways

For an employee to see **where they can go and how to get there**, they need the progression options mapped out for them.

Set out **what progression can look like** in the organisation and the choices an employee can make about their future direction. When pathways are visible, employees can make informed decisions about their career direction and see multiple routes forward, not just one narrow path.

You may require different pathways (Individual Contributor vs People Leader) to allow for the variety of skills and aspirations people bring.



Describe the skills – a template to get you started

A **skills framework** defines important skill categories required to deliver on a role, and what they mean at each level. Here are some example categories. Customise them to fit your organisation's needs.

Skill	What it means	Examples of sub-skills
Leadership	Problem-solving, driving change, making decisions, taking ownership	• Identifies problems and proposes solutions • Takes initiative without being asked • Makes decisions with incomplete information
Communication	Written and verbal clarity, presenting to different audiences	• Explains technical concepts to non-technical people • Writes clear documentation • Adjusts communication style for the audience
Technical/Functional Expertise	Core job skills, tools, methodologies	• Knowledge depth in your domain • Stays current with industry trends • Applies best practices
Collaboration	Working with others, building relationships	• Works effectively with diverse teams • Gives and receives feedback well • Resolves conflicts constructively
Delivery	Execution, meeting commitments, managing work	• Estimates work accurately • Delivers on time • Knows when to ask for help
Business Knowledge	Understanding the company, industry, and goals	• Knows how the business makes money • Connects work to company goals • Thinks about the customer
Mentorship	Supporting others' growth, sharing knowledge	• Helps others solve problems • Shares knowledge proactively • Gives constructive feedback



Define success – a template to get you started

A competency framework will show an employee how expectations change as people grow and move into different roles. Here's an example way to think about it. Customise this template and duplicate for each role type, to fit your organisation's needs.

Level	Leadership Skills	Communication Skills	Technical Skills
Entry	Identifies problems when they arise	Communicates clearly with immediate team	Learning foundational skills, works on well-defined tasks with guidance
Mid	Identifies problems proactively and investigates causes	Explains work to both technical and non-technical audiences	Solid skills in core area, works independently on medium complexity tasks
Senior	Identifies problems, investigates root causes, proposes solutions	Develops communication strategies for complex topics across multiple audiences	Deep expertise in multiple areas, handles complex tasks across systems
Lead/Principal	Identifies systemic problems, drives cross-team solutions	Influences company direction through compelling communication	Expert-level knowledge, sets technical direction

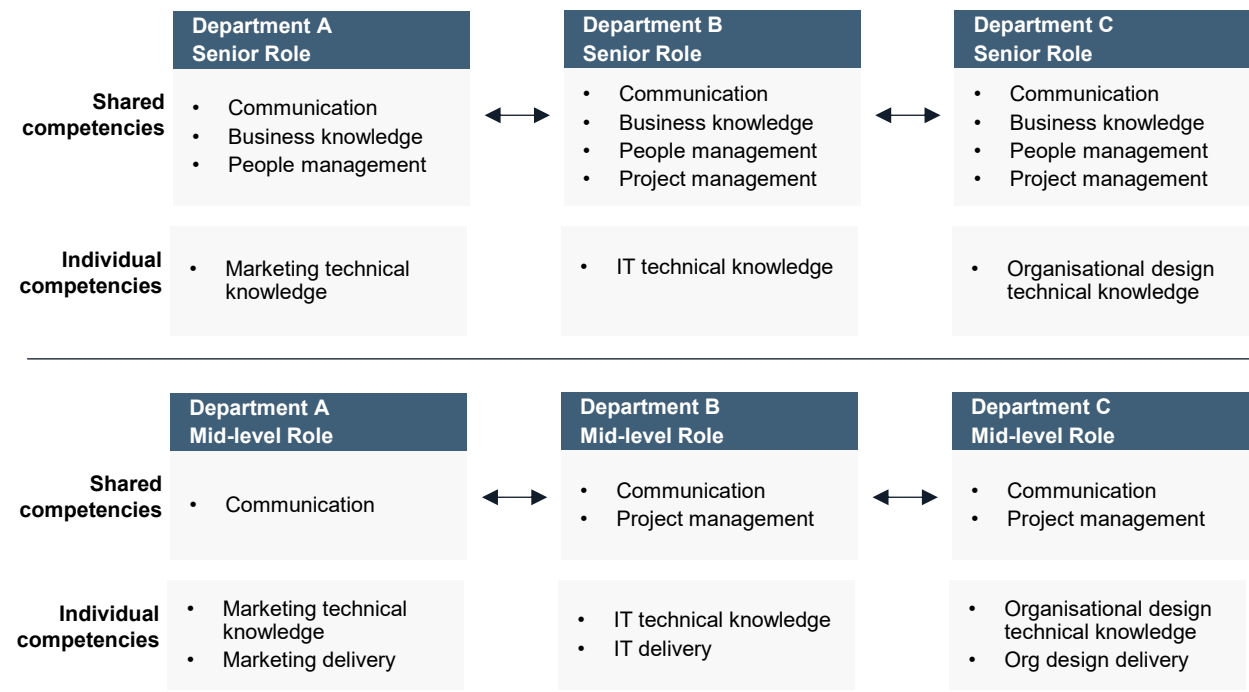
Consider:

- **Providing further visibility** for each role level to show the steps that they will take to 'level up' their skills towards the next role, typically you might see three 'levels' within a role, things like "entry level, established, approaching next level"
- **Defining success for each track** so that both an individual contributor and a people leader can see how to grow within their role



Clarify the pathways – an example to get you started

Career growth isn't always upward. A visual diagram of pathways through an organisation will support an employee to be ambitious while enabling retention of business knowledge. Use this example as a way to begin mapping shared competencies between roles and departments to provide greater visibility of sideways opportunities.



Why lateral moves matter:

- Build broader skills and perspective
- Prepare for future leadership roles
- Find better role fit without "demoting"
- Bring fresh thinking to new areas
- Prevent burnout through variety

How to enable them:

Show which competencies overlap between roles. For example, mid-level roles across multiple departments may required strong communication and project management capability – making the transition across more feasible.



Making it stick: supporting processes

A career framework only works if it's woven into your regular people processes. Here's how to make it real:

Performance Reviews

- Reference the framework explicitly when evaluating performance
- Ask: "Where is this person performing relative to their current level?"
- Use the competency examples as evidence—concrete behaviours beat vague assessments
- Separate the "how you're doing now" conversation from the "where you're going next" conversation

Regular 1-on-1s

- Pick 1-2 skills per quarter to focus development conversations on
- Ask: "Which competency do you want to stretch yourself in this quarter?"
- Discuss specific examples: "Tell me about a time this month you demonstrated X"
- Make the framework visible—literally have it open during the conversation

Goal Setting

- Tie individual goals to specific competencies they're trying to develop
- Make at least one goal per quarter explicitly developmental (not just delivery-focused)
- Use the framework's language: "This quarter I'll demonstrate Senior-level Communication by..."
- Review progress monthly, not just at year-end

Promotion Decisions

- Require evidence across multiple competency areas, not just "they're ready"
- Look for sustained performance at the next level (3-6 months), not one-off examples
- Document the decision using framework language for transparency
- Share the "why" with the team so others can see what progression actually looks like

Hiring and Onboarding

- Use the framework to write job descriptions and level new roles
- Assess candidates against the competencies for that level
- Share the framework with new hires on day one so they know what success looks like
- Use it to create 30-60-90 day onboarding plans

You'll know your career framework is working when:

- Employees can articulate what they need to do to progress
- Promotion decisions are more consistent and defensible
- Exit interviews show fewer people leaving due to unclear career paths
- Manager 1-on-1s include more developmental conversations
- You see more internal mobility and lateral moves
- High performers are staying longer



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Need Support?

Building a career development framework takes time and expertise. If you'd like support implementing a competency framework tailored to your organisation, we're here to help.

Get in touch:

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Whether you need help getting started, want feedback on your draft framework, or need support rolling it out across your organisation, reach out to discuss how we can support your team.

