



Human Capital Management
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Managing Career Paths for Remote and Hybrid Employees

May | 2023

The new way of working includes those employees who work remotely or in a hybrid arrangement. Indeed, a major Australian bank is negotiating with employees to embed this status as a right. So how do you build career paths for these employees and is it only your responsibility?

As the workforce shifts towards a hybrid model, where employees work both remotely and in the office, career development can become more challenging. The traditional career paths may no longer apply, and new approaches may need to be considered.

Remote work has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, with the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating the shift towards a more flexible and remote-friendly work culture. While remote work offers many benefits for both employees and employers, it presents unique challenges, particularly in terms of career growth and development. Here are some of the most prevalent.

Lack of FaceTime

One of the significant challenges to career development in a flexible working environment is the lack of face-to-face interactions. In the past, employees could interact with their managers and colleagues in person, discuss their goals, and receive feedback on their performance. With remote or hybrid work, it can be more challenging to build these relationships, and the lack of feedback and guidance can impede career advancement. Employees may miss out on opportunities to showcase their talents, and managers may not be aware of their achievements.

Feeling Disconnected

Another challenge with flexible working arrangements is the potential for employees to feel disconnected from the company culture. When employees work from different locations, they may miss out on events, social gatherings, and other initiatives that are essential for building a sense of community within the organisation. This disconnection can lead to feelings of isolation and disengagement, which can affect employee motivation and productivity. In turn, this can impact career advancement and development opportunities. Employers need to make a conscious effort to ensure that remote and hybrid employees are included in company culture initiatives and that opportunities for them to participate virtually are created.



Physical distance

Another potential challenge to career development for those on flexible working arrangements is the fact that they are removed from the workplace. This may require employees to develop new skills to work effectively in this environment. For some employees, this will be challenging, particularly those who have been used to traditional office-based work. Remote work requires a different set of skills, including time management, self-discipline, and communication.

Status imbalance

George Orwell's "Animal Farm" explores the notion of some people being more equal than others. This is a potential risk for remote and hybrid workers, as this work model can create a divide between those who work remotely and those who work in the office. This divide can lead to a lack of trust and communication, which can hinder career development opportunities. Office-based employees may feel that remote or hybrid workers are not pulling their weight or are not contributing as much as they are. Employers need to foster an environment of trust and transparency, ensuring that all employees feel valued and included.

Career path clarity

Another challenge with flexible working arrangements is the potential for employees to feel uncertain about their career paths. With remote work, it can be more difficult to visualise career growth and advancement opportunities. Employees may feel unsure about how to move up the career ladder, and there may be a lack of transparency around career advancement paths. Employers need to provide clear career paths and development plans for their employees, ensuring that such workers have access to the same opportunities as those who work in the office.

Tips for Employers

Creating career paths for remote employees is essential to ensure that they feel valued and have a clear understanding of their future with the company. Although a large chunk of the responsibility for career development falls with employers, there is much that individuals can do to advance their careers. This whitepaper seeks to give both parties some pointers on how to kick-start the process. Let's first look from an employer's perspective.

Access to training

One of the main challenges of creating career paths for employees on flexible work arrangements is the provision of opportunities for professional development and training. Such employees may not have the same access to training programs and resources as their in-office counterparts. Therefore, it is essential to provide remote-friendly training programs that can help employees improve their skills. Virtual training and e-learning platforms are excellent options for remote and hybrid employees, enabling them to access training materials and training sessions from anywhere (Biro, 2021).

Mentor programs

Mentorship and coaching are also crucial components of creating career paths for remote and hybrid employees. Mentors and coaches can help employees navigate the challenges of remote work, provide guidance and feedback, and offer support and encouragement as they pursue their career goals. Virtual mentoring and coaching programs are effective ways to provide these employees with access to mentors and coaches who can help them develop their skills and advance their careers (Biro, 2021). Although it is possible to design and implement such programs in-house, there are excellent external providers with turnkey options for rolling such services out quickly.

Measurable metrics

Another important task in creating career paths for remote and hybrid employees is to provide clear performance metrics and career progression frameworks. HR should embed programs to actively identify high-potential employees. Programs must offer clear performance metrics and opportunities for advancement and promotion based on merit, rather than location or physical presence. To achieve this, companies can use a variety of tools and strategies, including performance reviews, goal-setting frameworks, and job rotation programs. These tools and strategies can help these employees understand their career path within the company and provide them with clear goals to work towards (Willis Towers Watson, 2020).

Communication is key

Effective communication is critical to creating career progression for remote and hybrid employees. Companies have always needed to be transparent about their expectations and provide clear communication about career opportunities, promotions, and performance metrics. Now, they must ensure that such employees have access to the same information and opportunities as their in-office counterparts, and that they feel heard and valued within the company. Intranet and social platforms are readily available to facilitate this at a broadcast level. For more granular impact, regular check-ins with these employees can also help ensure that they are staying on track with their career goals and create space to address any concerns or issues that may arise (Llorens, 2021).



Embed inclusion

Building a culture of inclusivity and equity is vital. This means ensuring that all employees, regardless of their location or work arrangement, have access to the same opportunities and are treated fairly and equitably. Easy to say, but there are things to consider when doing this. Ensure you have adequate communication channels, such as online communication platforms, instant messaging and videoconferencing. Intranets can provide access to online resources, such as knowledge bases, tutorials or webinars.

Companies should also be intentional about creating a diverse and inclusive workplace, where employees feel valued and respected for their unique perspectives and experiences. This can be achieved through diversity and inclusion training programs, employee resource groups, and

company-wide initiatives that promote equity and inclusivity (International Labour Organisation, 2020).

Creating career paths for remote and hybrid employees requires effort and a focus on providing opportunities for professional development, mentorship, and advancement. Companies need to be transparent about their expectations, provide clear communication about career opportunities, and create a culture of inclusivity and equity within the organisation. Flexible working arrangements are here to stay, and companies that prioritise the career development of their remote and hybrid employees will be better positioned to attract and retain top talent in the future.

Tips for Employees

The tips offered above by no means suggest that career development falls within the purview of organisations alone. There are several strategies that employees can use to develop professionally and thus pursue their career goals remotely. Here are some of the key ones.

Build relationships

Remote employees should prioritise building strong relationships with their colleagues and managers. While physical distance can make it more challenging to build relationships, it is still possible to do so through regular communication, collaboration, and networking. Employees should take the initiative to schedule regular check-ins with their colleagues and managers, ask for feedback on their performance, and participate in company-wide initiatives and social events. By building relationships with their colleagues and managers, remote employees can demonstrate their value to the company, identify opportunities for growth and development, and position themselves for future advancement.

Self-manage professional development

Remote employees should invest in their professional development by seeking out training and learning opportunities. They should consider external training and learning opportunities, such as attending online courses, webinars, and conferences, or participation in industry-specific groups or associations. By continuously learning, employees can garner the skills required to progress their careers.

Set career goals

Those on flexible working arrangements should be encouraged to take ownership of their career development by setting clear career goals and a plan for achieving them. This involves identifying their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their long-term career aspirations, and creating a roadmap for how to address the gaps. Such employees should work with their managers to identify opportunities for growth and development within the company and create a plan for achieving those goals. By taking ownership of their career development, employees can demonstrate their initiative and commitment to career growth, increasing their visibility as candidates for succession planning.

Get coached

Remote employees need not rely on their employer to provide coaches or mentors to help them navigate the challenges of remote work and career advancement. Mentors and coaches can provide valuable guidance, feedback, and support as such employees strive to advance their careers. Employees can seek such people within their organisation or outside of it, through networking and professional development groups. By working with a mentor or coach, they can gain fresh insights into the company's culture and politics, and learn new approaches to problem-solving, which will aid in their career development journey.

Although flexible working arrangements present unique challenges for career advancement, there are several strategies that remote employees can use to develop professionally and achieve their career goals. By prioritising building relationships with colleagues and managers, investing in professional development, taking ownership of their career development, and seeking out mentorship and coaching opportunities, remote employees can position themselves for future advancement. By taking proactive steps to advance their careers, remote employees can demonstrate their value to the company and position themselves for success in their work environment.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, career development in a remote and hybrid environment can be challenging, but there are strategies that employers can use to overcome these challenges. By maintaining open lines of communication, ensuring remote employees are included in company culture initiatives, providing training and development, creating clear career paths and development plans, and fostering an environment of trust and transparency, employers can ensure that all employees have equal access to career advancement opportunities.

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Michael Howard, Founder