cipd

Research insight
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Managing careers for organisational capability

Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

The CIPD previously investigated the issue of career management with a survey of practice carried out in 2003. This predicted that career management would increase in importance as a tool to manage change.

Capability-building was identified as a key concept in CIPD work on sustainable organisational performance (CIPD 2011). Supporting individuals to identify and develop the capabilities identified as important in both the short and long term is hence a crucial issue in driving sustainable performance.

Key issues

1 Effective career management is broad-based and reflects the future skills and capability requirements of the employer and the desire of the individual for career opportunity.
2 New attitudes and a new work landscape are creating new and diverse career paths.
3 Capability-building through career management has implications for the design of 'smart' jobs which stimulate learning and growth for both individuals and their employers.
4 Organisations need to bridge the gap between the desire of individuals for employability or transferable skills and their need for 'job-ready' talent to step into specified roles.
5 Good career management drives engagement; poor career management breeds dissatisfaction.

Context

• Career patterns are different and more diverse than previously experienced, although upward progression is still indicative of career success.
• Responsibility for career management largely rests in a partnership between the individual and their line manager, although line managers receive little training to deliver effective career support.

• The current economic climate is having an impact both on the availability of career opportunities and individual career expectations.
• Most individuals rely heavily on informal career advice and either do not recognise or do not effectively access support provided by their employers.

Career management and change

• Managing change and meeting strategic objectives is a key goal for career management within organisations.
• The lack of line manager skill is identified as a significant barrier in effectively deploying career management to drive change.
• Organisations need to look at how they design jobs which provide mutual benefit for both individuals to develop skills and capability to access career opportunities, and the organisation to upskill and develop the talent needed to meet future challenges and priorities.

Career management as a driver of engagement and capability

• Employees who are satisfied in their jobs and have access to career opportunities are more likely to be engaged.
• Skills gaps are still an issue and employers need to plan ahead and develop guidance that provides clear signposts for individuals as to the skills required for future employment.
• Broad-based experience is seen as the most important factor for career progression and yet having an unconventional career history is seen as a barrier.
• Career breaks and needing time for family responsibility is viewed as a negative factor impacting upon careers.

Introduction

Career management is defined as:
'Planning and shaping the progression or movement of individuals within an organisation by aligning employee preferences, talent and potential with organisational resourcing needs both now and in the future.'

Over the past two decades the notion of 'career' has changed dramatically. As the shape of organisations has changed, so has the pattern of careers. From a largely organisation-driven 'route' through the hierarchical rungs of management, career paths in many organisations have morphed into talent pipelines with the emphasis on capability-building and broadening skills to develop flexibility, enabling people to be redeployed quickly in response to ever-changing market conditions. Concepts such as the 'boundaryless career', 'zig-zag careers' and 'project-based careers' have become a reality and career decisions are now largely driven by individuals and their desire to achieve their potential rather than a paternalistic employer offering a 'cradle to grave', well-signposted career map.

The research reported in this publication was designed to give an insight as to how career management can be used as a tool to manage change, drive capability and organisational flexibility and contribute to performance through enhanced engagement and productivity. It also identifies a number of issues and potential contradictions around career management with regard to both practice and attitudes, which are discussed with implications for practitioners.

Is career management still important?
Although the responsibility for career management has shifted onto the individual, the organisation still forms the context in which career decisions are made. This context is shaped by the way tasks are parcelled into jobs and how employers formulate their thinking about the skills, experiences and competencies

they expect the individuals who fill those jobs to possess. Of course in doing so the organisation is also responding to the wider world, which is demanding ever more innovative products and services delivered in continually changing ways, responding to the demands of a fickle customer base. This has transformed many jobs, seen the demise of some and the creation of new ones. Who in the 1980s had ever heard of a web designer or a digital marketer? And where have all the typists gone?

Globalisation too has had an impact on how careers are viewed by individuals and employers. It has driven significant change in the composition of the workforce in Western economies over the last decade, increasing the competition for jobs, creating a surge in employee mobility, a rise in the number of short-term and part-time contracts, greater diversity in the workplace and enhanced labour flexibility (Arnold 1997).

Even in jobs where the content and purpose has largely stayed the same, the skills and behaviours required to do them are changing. Many roles now require certain attitudes, behaviours and attributes more than particular skills or experiences, such as customer empathy or creativity. Yet much recruitment is still heavily task-based, using past experience and proven skill to test ability to carry out certain tasks. Too often this can be at the expense of 'talent' and precludes individuals, with the potential to perform, from accessing jobs because they cannot provide evidence of ability. It can also lead to individuals being led down narrow career paths despite all the evidence that broader skills and flexible skills drive capability and ultimately sustainable performance.

One of the major themes arising from the CIPD's project investigating sustainable business performance (CIPD Shaping the Future 2011) was capability-building. This work demonstrated that equipping

people in organisations with the skills and knowledge to meet both present and future challenges is a key issue in driving sustainable performance. This presents a powerful argument for investment in support and guidance to enable individuals to identify and build the capabilities the organisation needs, which in turn will unlock career opportunities for them personally.

What are the issues for individuals?

For individuals the criteria on which career choices are made are less well defined. It is becoming harder to navigate the career landscape and identify the career paths that will most likely result in fulfilling and sustainable work and enable them to access career opportunities throughout their working life. Do they choose a specialised route gathering evidence along the way, or will that lead them into a career cul-de-sac if they want to change direction at some point? If they develop broader skills, how are they to sell their skills in specific circumstances? How do they decide the skills and capabilities that are going to be in demand and keep them employed in the future?

Some of the existing evidence suggests that individual attitudes to careers are changing. Inevitably attitudes vary, with generation, gender and culture influencing the priorities and expectations that individuals have of their employment. Research by Las Heras (2009) highlights the difference between personal career goals and job decisions and argues that we tend to make career decisions based on the expected characteristics of a job and the extent to which we believe it will facilitate our career goals. This strengthens the case for better understanding of career expectations and packaging of job opportunities if organisations are going to successfully attract the talent they need.

The context for career management

The CIPD last considered career management in 2003, publishing the results of a survey of 700 UK-based employers on their career management practices. At that time the career progression model still appeared to be largely hierarchical, inflexible and male-oriented. Little additional career support was on offer to 'atypical' workers, such as those taking career breaks, part-time and older workers. More than 95% of the respondents believed that individuals should take responsibility for managing their own

careers, but 90% still believed they would have to offer some advice and support for this to happen effectively. Most respondents also believed that future career management would play an important role in organisational change and restructuring.

The advent of talent management programmes and the new emphasis on capability has refocused attention on the career and particularly how to guide people along career paths and skills acquisition that is going to maximise their potential to deliver value for employers, both currently and in the future. It would be simplistic to assume that career management has largely been eclipsed by the advent of talent management. However, the pendulum has certainly shifted towards the maintenance of a 'talent pool' rather than a focus on prescriptive career paths. Consequently, the onus is on the individual to be more proactive on how they manage their careers in a less well defined and constantly moving map of career opportunities.

Other changes have also taken place in the workforce. The continuing influx of migrant workers has often been attributed to a lack of skills or lack of willingness among UK workers to perform certain jobs. Indeed, CIPD research shows that young people lack vital workplace skills and employability traits, including business acumen, literary and numeracy skills, work ethic and communication/interpersonal skills (*Labour Market Outlook*, CIPD, summer 2010). Other changes to the jobs market are being driven by an ageing population exacerbated by the abolishment of the Default Retirement Age and lack of adequate pension provision, encouraging people to work longer.

This report draws on a range of data to explore what support is being offered to individuals to manage their own careers and how career management is being used within organisations to drive capability and agility – both identified by CIPD research (CIPD Shaping the Future 2011) as key drivers of sustainable business performance. We reviewed the literature on careers to identify the issues and challenges currently being faced and collected additional data on individual attitudes from our *Employee Outlook* survey conducted in July 2011 and a survey of practice conducted during August 2011. In addition, a number of practitioners

and career specialists were interviewed to test their views on practice and how career management can be used positively to drive both engagement and organisational capability and performance.

Section 1 considers what careers currently look like and how expectations and attitudes to career management are changing.

Section 2 looks at how career management can drive strategy and change and particularly how the practice is being used in organisations.

Section 3 considers how career management drives engagement and capability

Finally, the conclusion pulls together the key insights and implications for practice.

1 What do careers look like?

Career management has attracted a lot of attention in the literature, although much of this tends to focus on younger workers and graduates. There are also a number of commonly held beliefs around career management:

- Career patterns are changing, with people being more mobile and flexible.
- Attitudes to work are changing, with people demanding better work–life balance, better management and interesting jobs and younger entrants to the workplace have different expectations from their parents.
- Flexible talent is the key to success.

Changing career patterns ➜ A different attitude ➜ Flexible talent
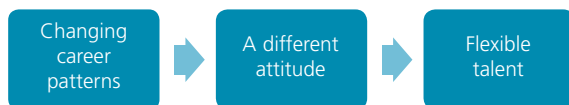
Changing career patterns

Much past career management practice concentrated on careers that traditionally developed within a stable work environment, focusing on linear progression within a single organisation's hierarchy, and was specific to white, middle-class males. Clearly this framework does not fit in today's context of a diverse demographic made up of higher numbers of educated women, a mix of minority groups and cultures, and a generation with different values and new technical skills. In a world where the ten most in-demand jobs in 2010 did not even exist in 2004 and where young people are estimated to have between 10 and 14 jobs by the time they're 38 (US Department of Labor, *Did You Know?* documentary, 2008), the concept of a 'boundaryless career' seems to have fully taken hold.

More career flexibility has pushed responsibility for career management into the hands of individuals, who rely heavily on informal career advice and any support they may have access to within their personal networks. In the CIPD *Employee Outlook* survey, individuals were asked where they go for career advice (see Table 1). Only 3% said they use a formal career management process provided by their employer, with very few finding it helpful. A further 6% said they have access to this and have used it in the past and 18% have access to a scheme but are not using it.

The problem with an over-focus on self-management and the support of informal networks rather than employer advice is that this can lead to unrealistic expectations and hence disengagement, job

Table 1: Sources of career advice (%) (respondents ticking all that apply)

Source	All	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55+
Professional careers advisers	7	17	6	8	4	7
Online advice sites	28	31	34	29	33	18
Professional journals and publications	15	14	16	16	14	14
Friends and family	37	66	54	35	30	29
Organisation's career management process	3	2	6	4	2	2
Other	7	2	2	3	5	15
Don't seek advice	30	12	21	34	34	33

dissatisfaction and ultimately poor performance if people feel unable to progress their career or access career opportunities. There are many complex facets to careers, meaning that a more structured approach may be needed to reap the mutual benefits for both the employer and employee. Such poor provision and take-up of employer-provided career advice is therefore a significant factor impacting on career decision-making.

Given the economic climate, Hall and Las Heras (2010) assert a need to integrate job design and career theory to generate new ideas for productive and fulfilling ways of working. They introduce the idea of *smart jobs* that stimulate learning and growth for both the individual and employer. After all, careers are essentially a series of work-related experiences over an individual's life span, thus when an individual makes a decision about a job they are also mindful about how this links to their whole career. This is an interesting notion for the employer, who may seek to influence career decisions by showcasing the career potential of various 'jobs'.
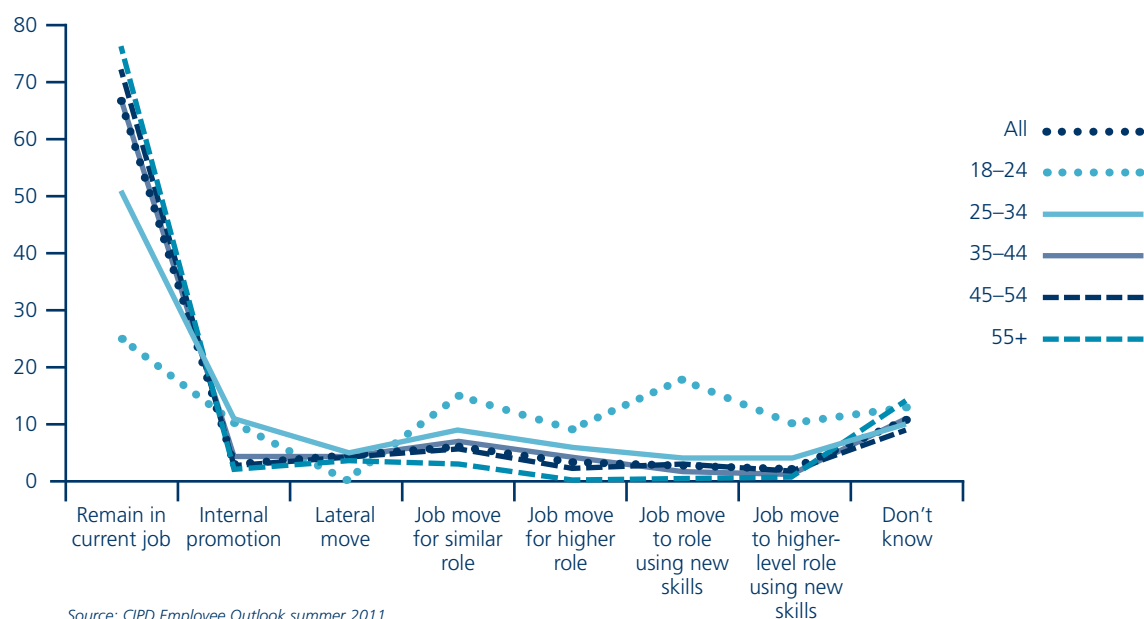
Career expectations

Studies on work attitudes (for example Sullivan et al 2009) find that younger workers do have higher demands for work–life balance and good management than those born in the 1960s. However, in terms of their demands for challenging work and a successful career, there is very little difference between the generations. The CIPD survey of practice also confirmed that practitioners believe that new entrants

to the workforce have different career expectations, are more prepared to make lateral moves, invest more time and energy in progressing their career and expect better balance between work and personal lives.

The CIPD's summer 2010 *Labour Market Outlook* (LMO) survey found many managers believe that young people are especially lacking employability traits and skills. Whether this is a marked difference from how things were when this generation of 'employers' were entering the labour market is uncertain due to a lack of longitudinal data; however, it is important to understand the impact these views have on career management in today's environment. In the CIPD's summer 2009 LMO survey, we found that employers are more likely to recruit graduates (around 50%) than school-leavers aged between 16 and 18 (24%). The tide seems to be turning, however, as more organisations are recruiting school-leavers to fill apprenticeships and, in some cases, replacing graduate schemes with apprenticeships. The attitudes towards degrees have also changed during the recession, with the realisation that many jobs do not require a degree, thus young people are once again looking at alternative entry points to employment.
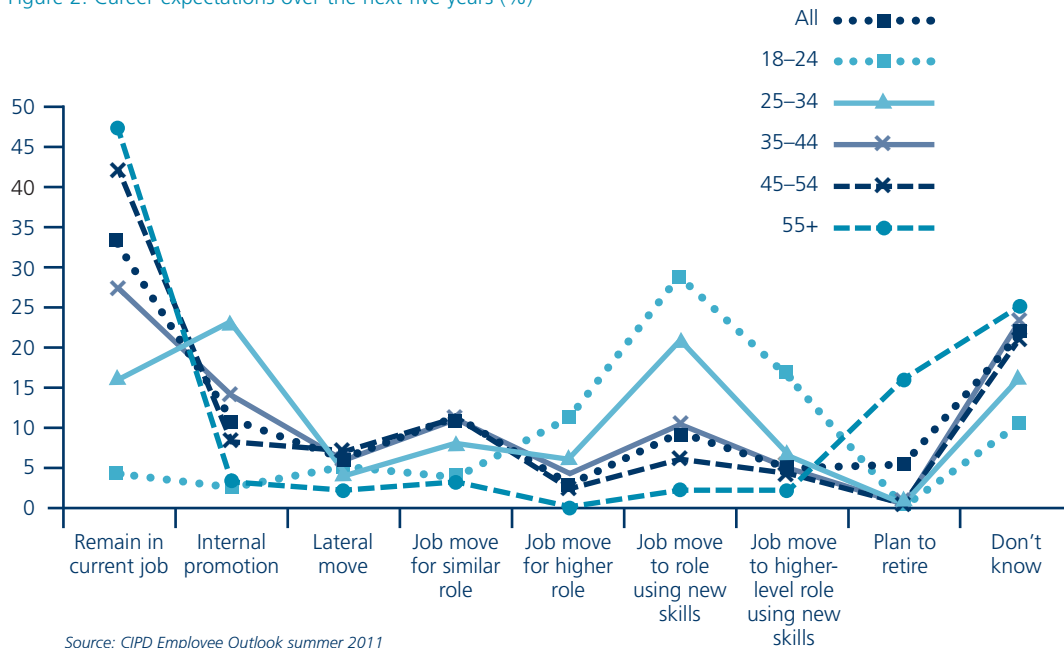
In the summer 2011 CIPD *Employee Outlook* survey, individuals were asked about their career expectations over the next one to five years. The results are given in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1: Career expectations over the next year (%)

Source: CIPD Employee Outlook summer 2011

Figure 2: Career expectations over the next five years (%)

All	● ● ● ■ ● ● ●
18–24	● ● ● ■ ● ● ●
25–34	▲
35–44	✕
45–54	✕
55+	●

Source: CIPD Employee Outlook summer 2011

The biggest number of career-movers in the short term (within a year) comprise the 18–24-year-olds, 18% of whom hope to change employers for a different role using different skills but at the same level. However, there are significant differences in expectations in the short and medium term.

There also appears to be a higher level of career uncertainty, with 21% of individuals overall unsure of what they can expect from their careers over the next five years. These figures would seem to suggest that career intentions are largely static, with people staying put rather than opting to move jobs in the short term – perhaps adopting a wait-and-see approach.

Many studies have found a negative association between attitudes to work and job insecurity (Otto et al 2011), indicating that employees are less engaged, less satisfied and more likely to suffer work- or stress-related illness if they feel insecure in their employment. Given that maintaining employability is one way to combat insecurity, this provides a strong case for taking career management seriously.

Again, in the CIPD *Employee Outlook* survey carried out in the summer of 2011, individuals were asked how optimistic they feel about being able to fulfil their expectations and make a career move.

Views were evenly spread, with roughly a third (30%) saying they are fairly or very pessimistic about their ability to change roles, either within their employing organisation or by joining a different organisation. Thirty-four per cent are very or fairly optimistic they could achieve their career intentions and 32% expressed a neutral view.

Most respondents expect to make fewer than three career moves in the next ten years, although 15% of 18–24-year-olds expected to make between three and five moves and 15% more than five. This is considerably less than some of the literature would suggest, again implying that career expectations have been impacted by the current lack of options for young people.

A different attitude to work among young people?
Recent surveys have highlighted that many employers are discontented with the attitudes and work ethic of young graduates. In addition, there is evidence that graduates tend to have unrealistic and overly ambitious expectations of the workplace. According to the CIPD's summer 2010 LMO survey, 37% of employers complain of a poor work ethic among graduates, while 33% think graduates lack the necessary business acumen. This has led to an increasing number of British

employers seeking workers from outside the UK; almost three times the number of organisations recruit migrant workers now compared with two years ago (8% spring 2009, 22% spring 2011; LMO). With the average number of applications per graduate vacancy at approximately 83 in the UK (Association of Graduate Recruiters 2011), unemployment levels in 2011 at a 17-year high of 8.1% (Office for National Statistics 2011) and almost 1 million young people recorded as not in education, employment or training, the concept of career management may seem like a luxury to many just hoping to become gainfully employed.

The top three priorities for the current cohort of graduates are, according to ILM/Ashridge (2011): challenging/interesting work (33%), high salary (32%) and career advancement (24%), with more than half (56%) of graduates expecting to be in a management role within three years of starting work.

On the one hand, these expectations may be a reflection of misplaced confidence in the value of a degree and poor work preparation. On the other hand, an individual's goals are at least partly shaped by their environment, and all sorts of other psychological, social, political and economic factors. Through this lens, one could argue that an evaluation of whether the expectations and goals of the young are unrealistic and overambitious is neither here nor there; what is important is that they exist and must be understood and managed, both within the organisation and society, in order to satisfy the needs of both parties.

Indeed, the ILM/Ashridge survey does highlight a disconnect between graduates' expectations and what their managers perceive to be their expectations, which may account for the findings that 38% of graduates are dissatisfied with career advancement in their current organisation, and 31% of managers see managing expectations to be the biggest challenge of working with graduates. For example, managers in the survey underestimated the importance of salary, career advancement and work–life balance to graduates, instead predicting that good management and leadership were at the top of the graduate wish-list (ILM/Ashridge 2011). This may help to explain the disappointing graduate retention rates that many recruiters experience; according to ILM/

Ashridge (2011), half of graduates plan to leave their current role within two years. It is no good designing talent management programmes to attract and retain ambitious high-potentials if one cannot fully appreciate their underlying motivations and expectations of working life.

Flexible talent

Talent management is now top of the CEO agenda, with 66% of CEOs saying a lack of skills is their biggest talent challenge (PwC 2011). According to our *HR Outlook* survey (CIPD, autumn 2011), talent has been identified as an area in need of significant development within organisations – and the earlier findings about graduate expectations raise some interesting implications regarding how their talents are going to be nurtured and developed.

Many researchers have found a difference in individual expectations of career management at varying points in their career. As you would expect, learning and development are seen as key priorities at the start of careers and whether this expectation is met or not can have an impact on organisational commitment (Tannenbaum et al 1991). Many researchers also argue that career self-management is easier at a later career stage once the individual has a network of contacts in which to seek career advice and opportunities (Chao et al 1994). Once the individual has more of an established career, promotion and extrinsic rewards are more likely to be effective for commitment and engagement.

Understanding the complexities of these issues is essential for effective career management. As Hall and Las Heras (2010) argue, effective talent management is dependent on understanding the various dimensions of conscious and subconscious goals that all individuals are motivated by in relation to their career success. Numerous surveys that have been conducted around the attitudes of people to work suggest that they are motivated by a desire to contribute to global issues (Forum for the Future/UCAS 2007), as well as the interplay of their work with family and social life. It is essential, therefore, that opportunities are offered to individuals that will enable them to meet their goals within each dimension that is important to their personal career development. According to

the Corporate Leadership Council (2006), there is a clear business case for improving the quality of job experiences, and thus career development opportunities, for the individual because, they argue, the demand for monetary compensation can be reduced by up to 50% when employees are satisfied in their jobs.

According to our survey of practice carried out in August 2011, 42% of respondents are delivering career management support as part of a wider organisation process to manage talent. These individuals were asked to describe the relationships between career planning and talent management and their responses are described in Figure 3. This figure belies the 3% take-up of company-provided career support reported in the summer 2011 *Employee Outlook* survey. This may be because individuals don't recognise the career support they are offered or because they believe it relates only to the employer's priorities and not their own.

These findings would seem to imply that much career management is still focused on upward career moves, whereas the argument for capability is about identifying capability at all levels and across roles.

Despite all the emphasis on talent planning, our *Employee Outlook* data confirms that financial incentives are still the prime motivators prompting a job move. The other main drivers are job satisfaction, development and the opportunity to learn new things. And although a high percentage of younger workers are money motivated, they are also significantly driven by the availability of career opportunities and development, indicating a willingness to flex to the requirements of the job market given the right opportunity and incentive.

The emphasis on talent over the last ten years or so has had a number of implications for career management. Some of our practitioners believe that this has shifted the focus.

The focus on talent management over the last ten years has led to a population of HR practitioners that focus on that and not careers.

Talent tends to focus on the top potential, but organisations need a broader strategy to manage skills that encompasses career management.

As a result our practitioners predict that future strategies would bring together both talent and career management to provide the broad raft of support and knowledge that is important to enable people to make career decisions in the context of up-skilling and driving capability.

Figure 3: How does career management relate to talent planning? (%)
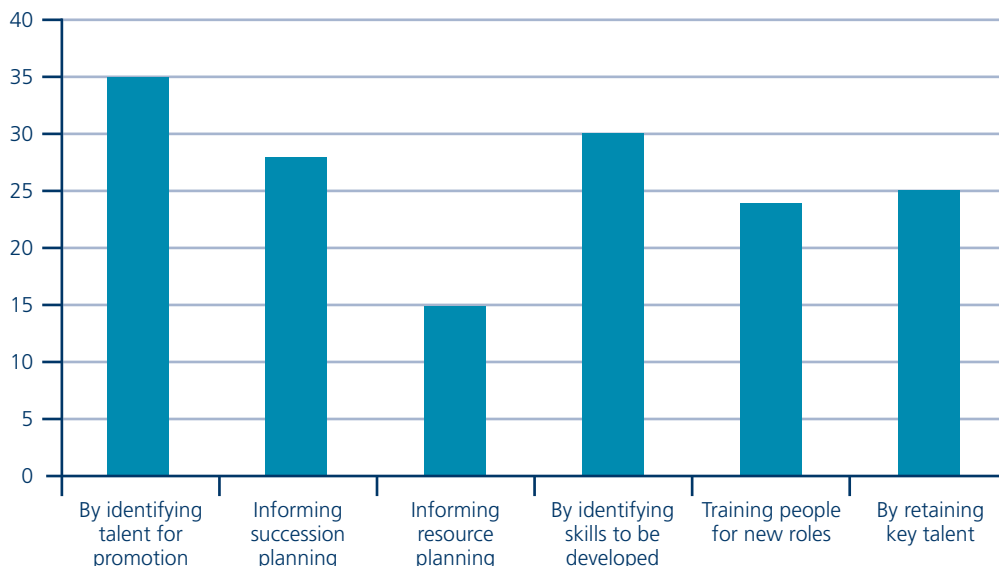
Source: CIPD survey of practice August 2011

Figure 4: Reasons for a job change (%) (respondents ticking all that apply)
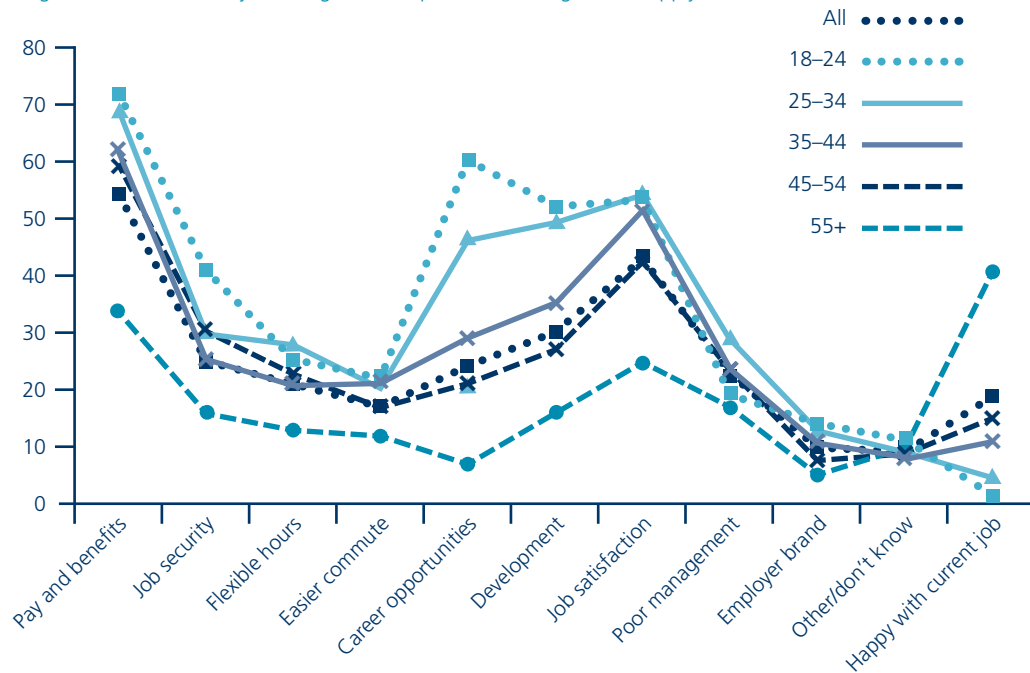
Source: CIPD Employee Outlook summer 2011

Smart organisations are making both strategies (career and talent) into one. Top potential should be part of the broader strategy, but everyone should be supported to develop the right skills, improve career mobility and get skills dispersed around the workforce.

Potential is a bit of a dirty word. We are trying to say that everyone has potential and that there are different types of people. We use a model that looks at people in terms of how they are performing today and their potential to move on.

[Organisations] worry about skills on the shop floor and top talent but neglect the people in the middle. We need a forward-looking strategy that looks at how jobs are evolving.

Reflection

The above demonstrates that while career patterns have changed and responsibility for career management has shifted to the individual, career decisions are still shaped by expectations of work, a changing labour market landscape and the importance of talent and capability-building to organisations. There is perhaps less difference in attitude between the generations than might be suspected, although managers do not always

fully understand the expectations of younger workers, which can lead to frustration and low retention levels.

Generally the respondents to the *Employee Outlook* survey feel their career mobility would be relatively low in the next year. However, this may well be a reflection of economic circumstance rather than job satisfaction as less than a third said they are optimistic about their chances of finding a new opportunity. The most unsettled group are young workers, only 25% of whom expect to remain in their current job over the next year. This group are much more likely to be lured into a new job by additional pay and benefits but are also looking for better career opportunities. This would suggest that more and more young people are having to take low-paid work which does not match their talents to get a foot on the career ladder. However, it may also reflect unrealistic expectations of work, as discussed above.

The results also seem to suggest that more people see their career moving across or between organisations rather than on an upward trajectory. However, they are also saying that access to career opportunities is a major factor in the decision to move on. It may be, therefore, that people are prepared to sacrifice an element of career progression in favour of career

sustainability – employability and job security that comes from a broad range of skills.

It is also apparent that the current economic climate is having an effect on these career opportunities and hence career mobility, with many people feeling insecure in their jobs and having to wait longer to make the job moves that will build their skills and experience. The weighted influence of family and informal networks on career decisions may also be having an effect and dampening career expectations and suggests that individual choices are influenced more by the experiences of those around them rather than the needs of employers.

Finally, we can begin to see the development of a more holistic approach to supporting people to make career choices within the context of a broad-based framework to manage talent and capability. The next section looks at this in more detail and considers how it relates to organisational strategy.

2 Using career management to drive change

The 2003 CIPD survey of practitioners concluded that career management would play a greater role in the management of change in the future and that the trend towards individuals taking responsibility for their own career management would accelerate.

Why manage careers?

In our survey of practice we asked respondents to list all the main objectives of career management, or why their organisations were concerned to offer career support. These responses can be found in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Main objectives of career management (%) (respondents ticking all that apply)
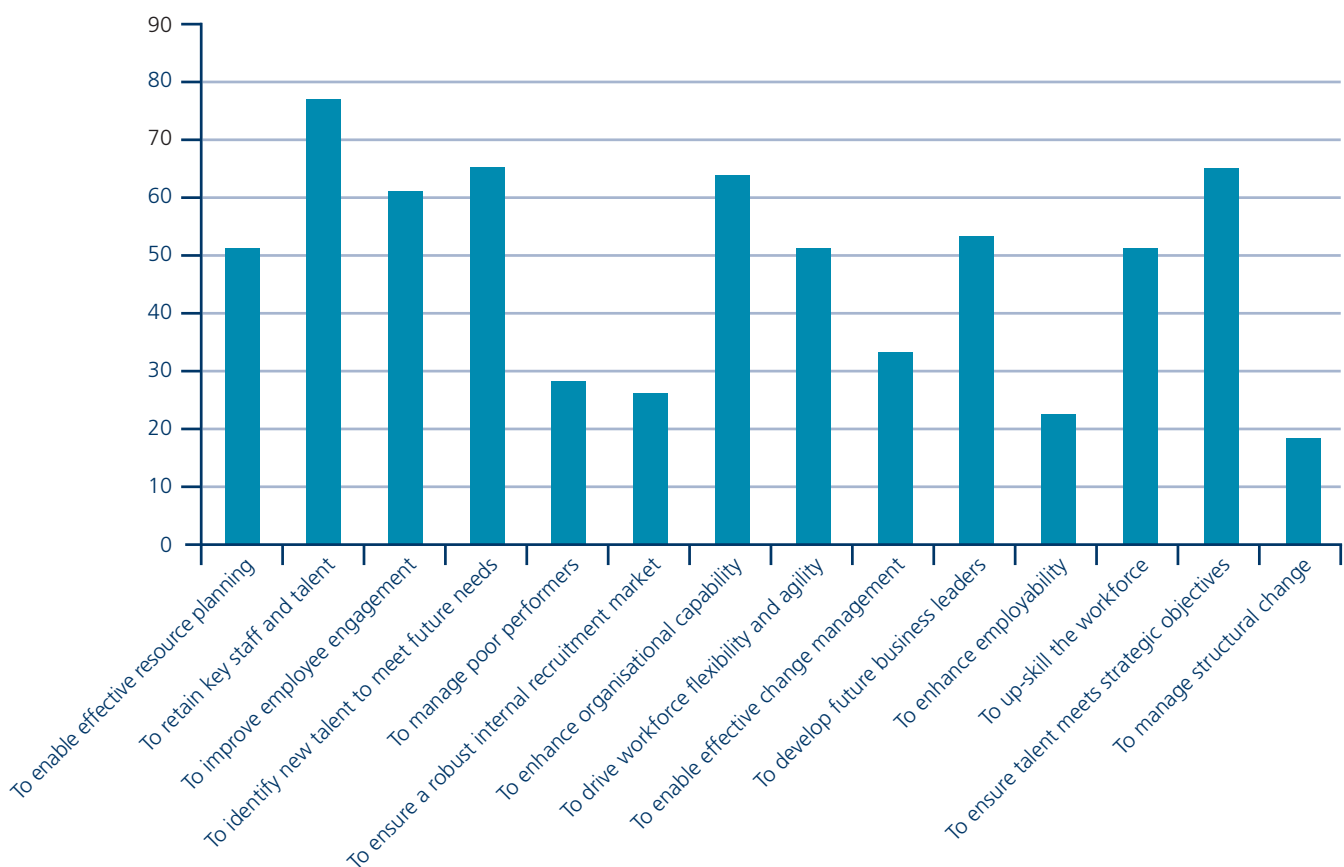
Source: CIPD survey of practice August 2011

Although immediate issues such as talent retention and engagement received a high priority, the majority of practitioners identified the objectives of career management as strategic and geared towards meeting strategic objectives and enhancing capability.

In addition, around half reported that senior managers believe career management has some relevance to business strategy and the majority also believe it is having at least some impact on developing capability.

All of this would seem to support the notion that effective career management is helping to shape the talent and capability the organisation will need to meet its future objectives and priorities.

Who's managing careers?
The second of the 2003 conclusions certainly seems to have come true. Whereas in 2003 38% of practitioners said that HR has the primary responsibility for career management, in 2011 only 3% said HR are in the driving seat.

The vast majority reported that career management in organisations is either the responsibility of the individual or a partnership between the individual and their line manager.

Clearly line managers are expected to play a key role in delivering any career support on offer. However, less than 3% of survey respondents reported that more than 10% of their line managers are receiving any training to enable them to deliver effective career management support.
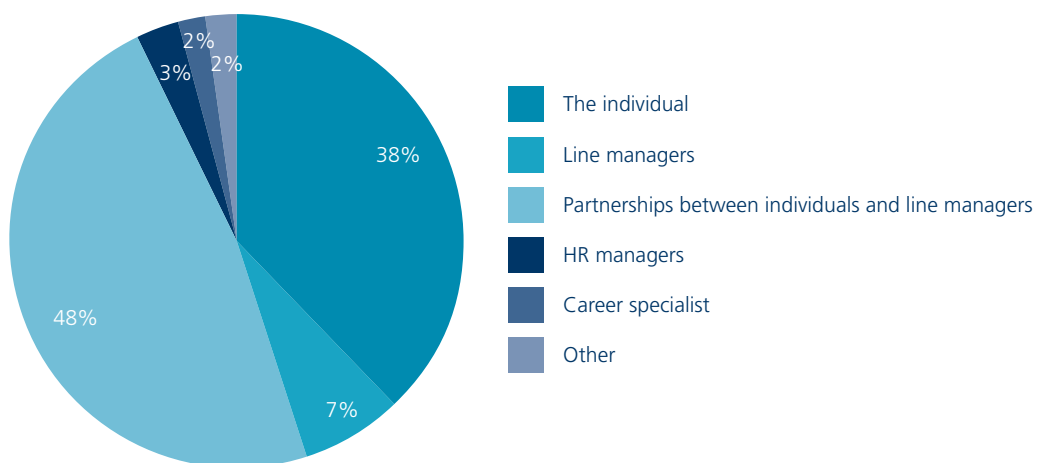
Some of the practitioners interviewed identified line manager skill as a barrier to effective career management and many are attempting to address this through development.

The [development] programme is about developing leadership capability and setting them up to support themselves and others.

We identified that our managers lacked coaching expertise so we put all people designated as managers through a programme. But not everyone has the ability to conduct open discussions, no matter how much training you give them, and sometimes you have to question if you have the right people as managers.

Line managers have not been trained to do it, but then neither do they have the time. This is going to affect capability moving on if we don't address it. Employers have to work harder to attract the right talent and they move on if they don't get good management.

Figure 6: Who has primary responsibility for career management? (%)

- The individual
- Line managers
- Partnerships between individuals and line managers
- HR managers
- Career specialist
- Other

38%
7%
48%
3%
2%
2%

Source: CIPD survey of practice August 2011

In terms of the kind of career management support individuals are getting, Figure 7 demonstrates that the most common guidance is focused on enabling individuals to improve their performance and widen the scope of their current role. It is also common for career support to be focused on the short term or on the next promotion. But around a third of organisations are also focusing on long-term career aspirations.

The majority of employers are making this support available through the appraisal process or by the use of personal development plans, which may also explain the reliance on line managers as the providers of career support.

The impact of career opportunity
Since 2008 the contraction in the labour market has significantly reduced career opportunities for large numbers of workers. The latest unemployment statistics from the ONS highlight that one in three unemployed people have been without work for more than a year. CIPD Chief Economist John Philpott has warned that we are likely to see the return of the 'Gissa job' economy that 'scarred Britain in the 1980s and 1990s'. With a disproportionate number of the

unemployed comprising young workers between 18 and 24, their work-ready skills are likely to be eroded even further, giving rise to the spectre of a 'workless generation' discussed by several commentators. These factors may change attitudes to work and career management further.

Graduates have been particularly adversely affected, with many obliged to compromise and accept a job that does not fit with their desired career path or even their degree. According to an ILM/Ashridge survey (2011), only 17% of graduates are in the 'right job' and career progress is frustratingly slow; these findings may explain why more than half (57%) of graduates plan to leave their present role within two years, despite the competition for jobs (ILM/Ashridge 2011).

Traditional and contemporary approaches to career management tend to imply that individuals have a choice over their career path; this idea has been challenged by academics such as Roberts (1997) and Sullivan (1999), who argue that in reality, career management is influenced and shaped by the opportunities and contacts that surround individuals. The current lack of career opportunity for young people

Figure 7: What career support do organisations give? (%)
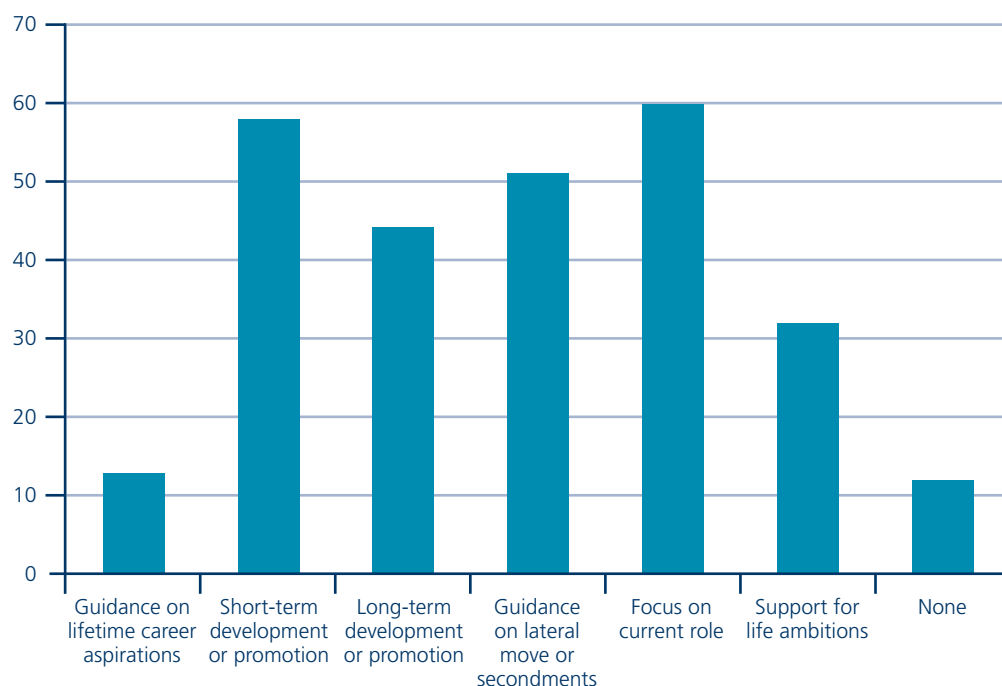
is likely therefore to have an indelible impact not only on their own careers but also on those of their children.

Organisations and business leaders increasingly recognise the need to work with governments and education systems to improve skills in the talent pool, which will hopefully go some way to help increase career opportunities for young individuals. For those already in work with a passion to develop their careers globally, opportunities to be deployed to international assignments appear to be on the increase, with the majority of organisations envisaging changes to this aspect of their talent strategy (PwC 2011).

Driving learning through career management

If career management is going to make a significant contribution to the management of change, it must impact the learning of individuals and influence them to gain new skills that can be applied in new circumstances. As discussed above, a win–win situation for both organisations and individuals will be when individuals are supported to develop the skills the organisation will require in the future, ensuring both the supply of skills and sustainable employment for individuals.

In the CIPD summer 2011 *Employee Outlook* survey, individuals were asked what skills they expect to acquire over the next five years. More than half expect only to maintain their current level of knowledge, refreshing skills where necessary. However, a sizeable 16% want to develop new skills to change their career path and 36% hope to develop the required skills to progress their careers.

This would seem to indicate that both individuals and their employers are focusing on the here and now in terms of skills development. However, the consensus among the practitioners and career specialists interviewed as part of the data collection process is that career management should be linked to strategy informing on the talent and skills needed to achieve the organisation's strategic objectives. Most of the practitioners we talked to are doing that. Below are some of the comments they made with regard to strategy and linking career management to the strategic objectives:

We use an organisation-wide planning process, which is done on an annual basis. This is aligned to the business strategies and looks at talent supply, asks do we need to source people externally or do we have the talent to develop them internally? It then informs various programmes in the company, including career management to help develop the required skill set.

What does our strategy tell us now and for the future? We need to get much closer to the organisational capabilities and to do that we need to link this up with individuals' needs to build knowledge and capability.

Managers look at what's next in terms of skill sets and then put some processes in place to contribute to the strategic planning.

We embedded talent development in organisational strategy and goals, which is linked to business scorecards and the global picture.

Table 2: Learning expectations (%) (respondents ticking all that apply)

Intention	All	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55+
Maintain current skills	52	29	46	51	58	54
Develop new skills to progress career	36	56	52	43	36	19
Develop new skills to progress to a higher career level	25	56	54	30	19	7
Develop new skills to change career path	16	51	24	15	16	7
Don't expect to learn anything job-related	8	2	5	7	9	9
Other/plan to retire	8	0	1	2	3	20

Source: CIPD Employee Outlook survey summer 2011

Reflections

Both of the predictions of the 2003 career management survey seem to have at least in part been borne out by our findings. Managing change and meeting strategic aims is indeed a key objective for many businesses practising career management. However, it would appear there is still a long way to go, with a large minority of senior managers still failing to recognise the potential of career support to direct employees to develop the capability on which to build their futures.

We also found that the trend towards individuals taking responsibility for their own career management has accelerated, with the support that is provided done so through, largely untrained, line managers. With two-thirds of employees, particularly young people, relying on family and friends for career advice and, given that organisations appear to be dissatisfied with the skills and traits of many of their young employees, should they be doing more to develop the attributes and capabilities they so desire? It may therefore be time for employers to take a more active role in career management – or at least be open to an effective dialogue between both parties.

Lips-Wiersma and Hall (2007) highlight an interesting challenge around career development during organisational change. First, any change in the organisational structure will affect people's jobs, prompting a perceived loss of control over their career. In addition, the skills and competencies needed to fulfil the new work environment requirements may be different, so who takes responsibility for developing these competencies? This dilemma will undoubtedly become an increasingly significant factor in career management, as organisational change is going to be a recurring theme for most employers and employees.

Young people have high expectations of learning, both to maintain current skills and to develop skills to progress or change career direction. This would seem to reflect a willingness of young people to develop their skills to progress their careers and open up career opportunities, suggesting their situation is more influenced by a lack of opportunities than inflated expectations.

3 Career management as a driver of engagement and capability

Whether the current emphasis on individual career management has had an impact on levels of engagement and organisational commitment is not clear, though recent findings from our *Locus of Engagement* research (CIPD 2011) suggest that employees are most highly engaged with the task aspect of their work, as opposed to engagement with the organisation as a whole. This reinforces the concept of a 'boundaryless career' (Arthur and Rousseau 1996), which is best described by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) as a sequence of 'job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of single employment settings'.

Thus proactive individuals seeking to advance their careers are likely to be more willing to change organisations and to seek jobs which give them exposure to the experiences and skills they need to develop to make their next career move. By default, if the organisation can offer developing jobs which

also meet their needs for capability, there should be significant gains on both sides.

Exploring this issue of career management as a driver of capability, the survey of practice asked whether practitioners believe career management to be driving organisational capability. The vast majority believe it is (see Figure 8).

However, the survey also asked about barriers to effective career management. The biggest hurdles were reported as lack of commitment from senior managers and career management being seen as a 'nice to have' but not essential people management practice (see Figure 9).
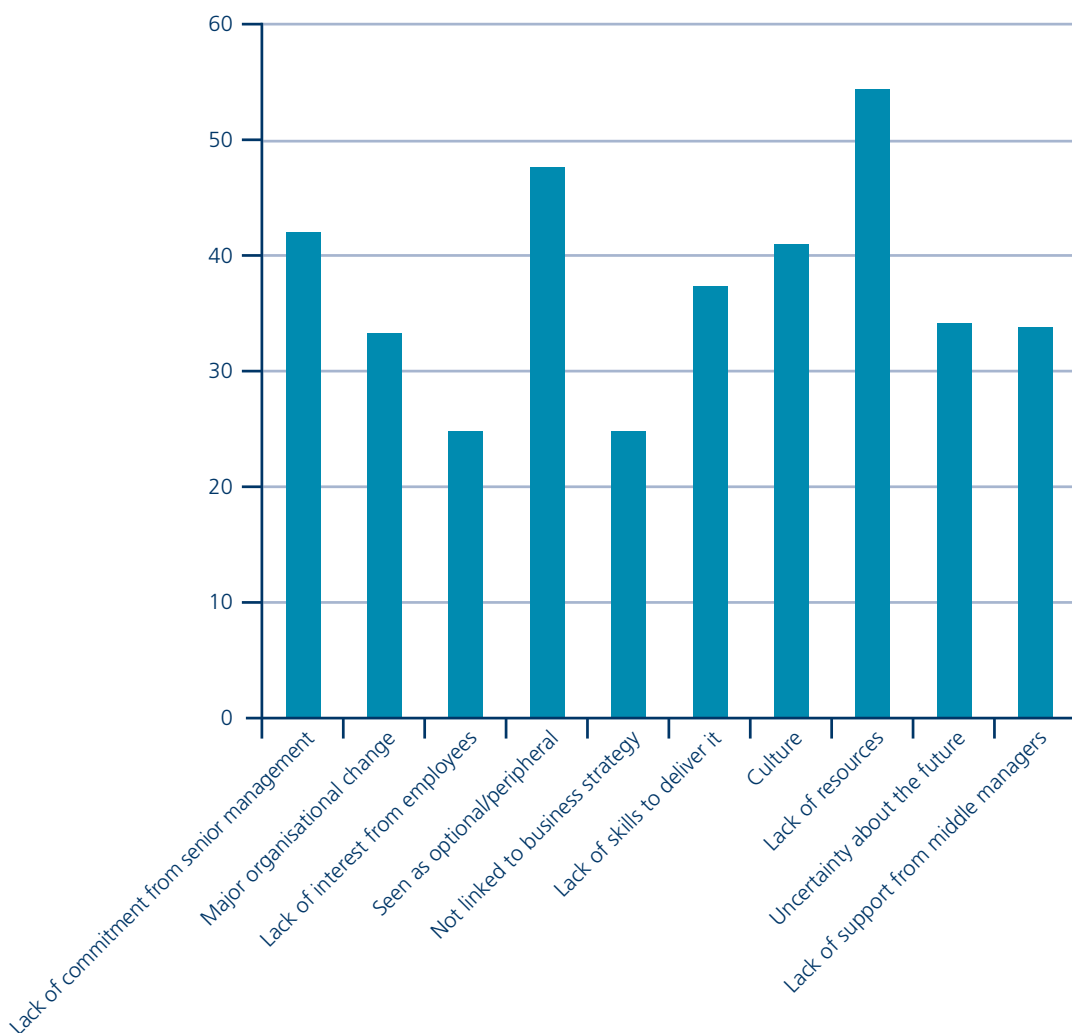
At the practical level, one of the biggest issues facing many of the practitioners interviewed – even in a period of high unemployment – is skills gaps.

Figure 8: Is career management driving organisational capability? (%)

- Not at all
- To some extent
- To a great extent
- Don't know
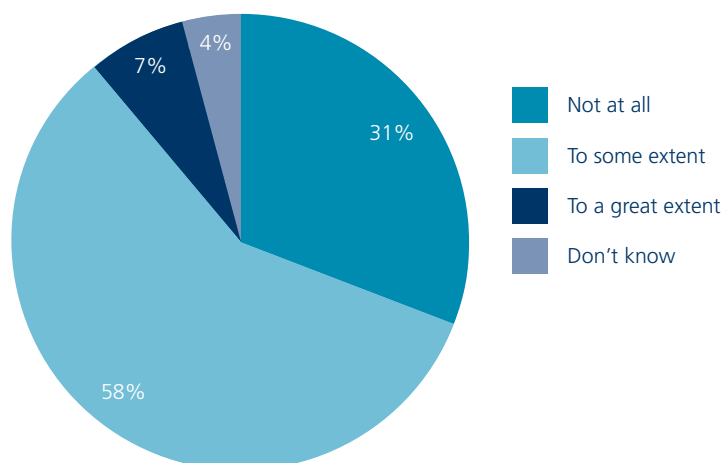
Source: CIPD survey of practice August 2011

Figure 9: Barriers to effective career management (%)

Source: CIPD survey of practice August 2011

Skills gaps are a priority. We need to be aware of both what people need to do today as a minimum standard and be looking ahead at where the company is going and what we will need in the future.

Cutting back on career management because of cost means we are only focused on skills to do the job and are not looking forward.

All of these practitioners also agreed that career management has an important role to play in driving capability.

Capability gaps are being identified by the strategic review and providing evidence for issues that are likely to hinder growth in the future. If we can get line managers to have the right discussions with individuals and to use the right tools to develop their skills, we can make a real impact.*

It is absolutely vital to manage careers to drive capability. You can also build a picture of what's happening in the [labour] market and feed this into the strategic planning process to get the bottom–up and top–down picture.

This theme of career management driving a forward-looking focus enabling both individuals and their organisations to better understand how jobs, and the capability required to do them successfully, is

challenging. But many practitioners reported their organisations are already embedding it into their top-level strategy.

The organisational goal is to grow capability and that starts with people knowing about the organisation and what opportunities are available to them.

The CEO has specifically stated that he wants to put talent and unmatched talent as a key priority for the organisation because the engagement results clearly show people want to know what's in it for them to stay.

We have global measures around attrition and engagement. Under each there is some alignment to business strategy. People will tend to concentrate on short-term results, so they need to be pushed to look ahead and develop people to ensure they deliver in the future as well. The smarter leaders get it.

Career management and engagement

This issue of career management as a driver of engagement was picked up in the literature and is also given weight from our survey data, which suggests that one of the primary reasons people are prepared to change job is to access career opportunities. Our interview respondents agreed with this.

It can be demotivating if your career is not being taken seriously – if you feel you are just there to earn money.

Given the marketplace, people are thinking about how they can up-skill. That's why our employee value proposition is so important; people want to feel their career is moving.

The potential impact of career management on both capability and engagement was further tested in the survey of practice, with a number of questions probing attitudes to career management (see Table 3). Generally respondents agreed most strongly with the sentiment that career planning is essential to developing organisational capacity and that people still expect career promotion as a sign of career success. There is also agreement that people are more likely to leave organisations if their career expectations are not met.

Table 3: Attitudes to career management (%)

Intention	Strongly agree	Agree	Partly agree	Disagree
Career paths are becoming more flexible and less well defined.	19	49	20	12
New entrants to the workforce have different career expectations from existing employees.	22	54	19	5
People are more prepared to change organisations to develop their careers than in the past.	32	43	18	7
People still expect promotion as a sign of career success.	42	44	13	1
People are increasingly prepared to invest time and money in their own career management.	12	36	42	10
Employees are demanding better balance between work and their personal life.	28	49	19	4
Talent is more important to career progress than specific experience or qualifications.	13	34	40	13
Individuals must be prepared to make sideways as well as upward moves to develop their careers.	35	52	12	1
Career and/or talent planning is essential to developing organisational capacity.	41	50	8	1
The abolition of the Default Retirement Age will have a significant impact on career planning.	18	32	31	19

Source: CIPD survey of practice August 2011

What influences career progression?

The final part of the survey of practice was designed to generate some understanding of the factors which might impact positively or negatively on an individual's career progression. Respondents were given a list of factors and asked to rank the top five which they believe would exert the most positive influence and the top five which they believe would have the most negative effect.

The most important factor for career progression appears to be developing a broad range of experience, which was ranked top by 30% of respondents. The biggest negative influence is taking a long period of sickness absence, ranked top negative influence by 43% of respondents. Also featuring in the top five negative factors are taking a career break and needing time for family responsibilities.

Reflection

At the top level there is significant agreement for the positive role of career management as a driver of organisational capability. In addition, talent and skills development has been identified as a top priority for CEOs. However, a lack of resources, lack of commitment from senior managers and the fact that many practitioners reported that career management is seen as an 'optional extra', people management practice would seem to indicate that this is aspiration rather than reality.

Given that practitioners are also indicating that skills and capability gaps are likely to hinder growth, it would seem that there are some significant benefits to be gained for many by looking again at how they can support individuals to develop the skills needed. Of course, this is not just about putting career management in place; it is also about generating the insight into what future capability looks like and how talent and skills can be shaped to match it.

There is also apparently some ambiguity about the role of career management as a driver of engagement. The literature and practitioners agree that individuals will be more likely to change jobs and less motivated if they are unable to access career opportunities in their current position. There is also evidence that job insecurity is linked to disengagement and, in turn, that job insecurity is fuelled by lack of career opportunity. However, most often this also involves

Table 4: Top five most positive influences on career progression

Influencing factor	% respondents ranking top	% respondents ranking in top 5
Developing a broad range of experience	30	66
Having specific experience in the field	23	62
Gaining extra relevant qualifications	11	51
Taking on extra work responsibilities	9	44
Working in a number of business areas	7	50

Table 5: Top five most negative influences on career progression

Influencing factor	% respondents ranking top	% respondents ranking in top 5
Taking a long period of sickness absence	43	80
Declining a promotion	16	59
Taking a career break	13	53
Having an unconventional career history	6	32
Needing time for family responsibilities	2	45

Source: CIPD survey of practice August 2011

upward progression and, given the current economic climate and its impact on career opportunities, there seems to be a real risk that a lack of career support coupled with a failure to really understand the career motivations of individuals could lead to disenchantment and under-performance.

Finally, our respondents confirm that experience and skills are the primary factors contributing to career success, whereas needing time for family responsibilities or taking time out are the biggest career disadvantages. Clearly this has big implications for diversity and talent. However, here again there is little agreement amongst practitioners, with almost as many believing that specific skills and hence narrower career paths are drivers of career success as a more broad range of skill. Indeed, there are a significant number who ranked both issues in their top five drivers of career success.

Conclusions and implications for practitioners

The evidence presented in this report points to a number of insights around the practice and purpose of career management.

1 Effective career management is broad-based and reflects the future skills and capability requirements of the employer and the desire of the individual for career opportunity

It is clear that too narrow an approach to career management focused on the individual will not meet the needs of business to create a capable and adaptable workforce that can be flexibly deployed and up-skilled to meet the ever-changing demands of the global marketplace. Both the literature and the CIPD's *Employee Outlook* survey point to a mismatch between what individuals want from a career and what managers think they want. It is also clear that there are a multitude of forces at work which impact on career decisions – not all of them work-related.

There is also evidence that organisations need to be clearer about what a career means. As one of our interviewees put it, *'What is the deal? Organisations are honest about how they are changing but not always giving the help which might be needed by individuals to navigate these changes.'*

Career management is not just about providing advice to employees; it's about creating a partnership whereby employers can guide employees to develop the capabilities they need tomorrow but within a context which recognises that individuals are different and will have different expectations and requirements from a career.

Implications for practice:
- Is there sufficient information available to really understand the career aspirations of staff?
- Are managers encouraged and supported to have open and honest discussions with employees about their career expectations and potential to develop?
- Does the organisation have mechanisms in place to identify the capabilities required in the future?
- Does the communications strategy ensure all employees are aware of these capabilities and are given guidance on how to develop them?

2 New attitudes and a new work landscape are creating new and diverse career paths

Career paths have been changing for some years now. Both the literature and our survey and interview data suggest that careers are more likely to be a journey across a few interesting jobs rather than constant progression up a ladder. There is also a growing recognition that management – the traditional symbol of career success – is not a suitable route for all individuals. Many organisations are reflecting this in their career paths, designing specialist career routes to enable people to progress by developing and deploying specialist skills rather than progressing into a management or leadership role.

However, there is also evidence that individuals, young people in particular, view a management role as evidence of career success. In a global context, practitioners reported that in some cultures constant, albeit small, steps up a hierarchy of responsibility is still expected and failure to provide this could have severe implications for talent retention and motivation.

In addition, young people are growing up in a world of less job security than has existed for previous generations. Their mentality is more about keeping themselves employable and pushing employers to give them the opportunities to enable them to do so.

To make the most of and to retain their talent, employers therefore need to put more effort into demonstrating what particular roles and challenges will offer in terms of skills and capability development.

The indications are that people are prepared to move sideways and progress along a non-managerial career route if they believe they are still progressing and that they are developing new and tradable skills that will be marketable in the future.

Implications for practice:
- Are a range of career paths open to employees?
- Are these clearly identifiable?
- Are the benefits of alternative career paths, in terms of career options of skills development, adequately communicated?
- Do career path options reflect the strengths, weaknesses and development potential of employees?
- Are there adequate assessment practices in place to identify employees' suitability for alternative career paths?

3 Capability-building through career management has implications for the design of 'smart' jobs which stimulate learning and growth for both individuals and their employers

The best outcome from career management for both individuals and employers is that it reflects the current and future capabilities required by the organisation to fulfil its strategy and meets its objectives as well as meets the needs of individuals to develop marketable skills which enable them to feel secure and challenged in their jobs, driving their engagement and enhancing their value to the organisation.

These attitudes will need to be reflected in both career and job design as talented individuals might be reluctant to commit to an over-specialised career path if they believe it will close off other options. Similarly, some projects might be more difficult to resource than others if people perceive they will offer less opportunity to build credibility and experience.

Similarly, if employers want to keep people challenged and motivated with work they find interesting, they will have to be more creative when upward career progression is likely to be slower. More-flexible jobs with scope to develop and grow are more likely to offer positive benefits for both employee engagement and organisational capability.

Implications for practice:
- Is the organisation offering flexible jobs in which people can grow their potential?
- Is this reflected in the organisation structure and the design of jobs?
- Is the emphasis on shaping the individual to fit the job or designing the job to match the strengths and capabilities of the individual?

4 Organisations need to bridge the gap between the desire of individuals for employability or transferable skills and their need for 'job-ready' talent to step into specified roles

As discussed above, individuals value employability – the ability to develop tradable skills and career mobility and access a wide range of opportunities. However, most organisations believe they can only derive value from career management if they are preparing people for roles within that organisation. As a result, there can be a mismatch between the organisational view of preparing people for future employment, the succession planning role-focused approach and enabling people to develop their talents in a more innovative and flexible way.

This can result in a rigidity which hinders the redeployment of staff to cope with varying work flows or a changing organisational shape. It might also channel people into inappropriate roles if they believe moving into a role for which they are ill equipped is the only way to career success or that refusing such roles will have career repercussions.

Career management should seek to enable people to understand the difference between employability – keeping their career options open – and preparing themselves for employment in a particular role. It should also help them to understand how progression through a series of roles can help them achieve employability. In addition, if people are given sufficient information to enable them to make informed decisions about job roles and their suitability both in terms of skills and other attributes for them, the organisation is likely to have fewer resourcing problems and better engagement. Recruiters should be challenged to look at the person and understand what they can do rather than force people to conform to too rigid a job mould.

Implications for practice:

- Are the reasons for any skills shortages adequately explored?
- Are the reasons for 'role failure' adequately identified?
- Does the organisation understand the additional benefits from career management in terms of flexibility and engagement?

5 Good career management drives engagement; poor career management breeds dissatisfaction

The evidence suggests that far from prompting individuals to leave organisations, building their employability actively drives engagement, job satisfaction and employment. If people do not feel engaged or feel that the organisation is not interested in their career, they are more likely to see their career elsewhere.

However, given that most career support is framed by the line manager relationship, clearly there is a need to both skill line managers and embed positive career conversations into developmental reviews. To do this there needs to be more emphasis on the future rather than pressure to achieve short-term results.

The research also told us that few line managers are being supported to develop the skills needed to have positive career conversations with employees. By recognising the link between enabling people to feel positive about their career options and engagement, there will be even greater emphasis on the line manager delivering on career support. It is also important that line managers are encouraged to really understand the career drivers for different groups of workers to ensure they maximise the benefits of supporting them to make good career choices.

Implications for practice:

- Are line managers being supported to offer career advice?
- Is satisfaction with career progression or opportunities measured?
- Do line managers recognise the link between career opportunity and engagement?

Methodology

Two surveys and a series of telephone interviews were used to collect data for this work, the CIPD *Employee Outlook* survey (a telephone survey of individuals) and an online survey of practice sent to CIPD members expressing an interest in career management.

In July 2011 a number of questions relevant to career management were inserted into the CIPD's *Employee Outlook* survey. This is a quarterly survey of UK employees to identify their opinions of and attitudes towards working life. Questions covered expectations of attaining career goals, learning objectives and reasons that might prompt a career move as well as a question asking where individuals go for career advice. The survey was completed by 1,778 individuals as follows:

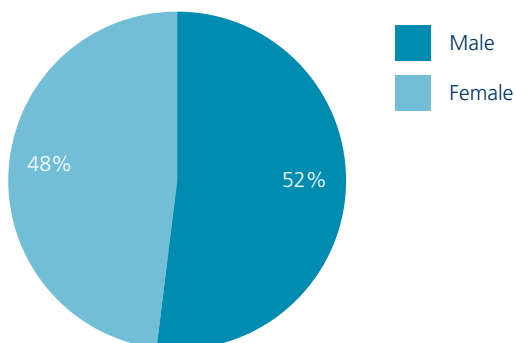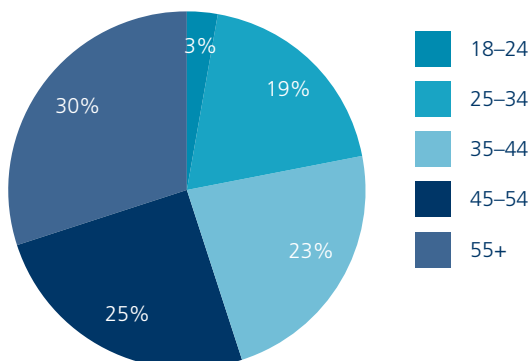Figure 10: Gender breakdown of *Employee Outlook* respondents (%)

Figure 11: Age breakdown of *Employee Outlook* respondents (%)

An online poll of current practice was conducted during the summer of 2011. The poll went live in July and closed at the end of September. A total of 332 respondents completed the poll from a range of sectors and organisations.

The poll was structured to first investigate how careers are being managed in organisations, who has the responsibility for careers and what kind of support employees are being offered to help them make career choices. Second, we asked a number of questions around why organisations are concerned to manage careers, what the objectives of career management might be, whether it might be identified as having the potential to drive strategic objectives and how committed managers are to the concept. Finally, we were interested to find out what HR practitioners think about careers and how they believe career expectations and career paths to be changing. In addition, we included questions to identify the factors which might have a negative or positive effect on career opportunities.

The telephone interviews were carried out using a structured questionnaire to test some of the issues arising from the surveys and to probe other questions in greater detail. Interviewees were asked a series of questions about how career management might be used to drive strategic objectives such as change management, capability or organisational flexibility, how it related to other practices such as talent management, succession planning or development and what outcomes are expected for the organisation and individuals.

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