

Career development plan: Employee growth guide and examples

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Executive Summary

This article, published by Leapsome, addresses the challenge HR professionals face in creating structured, personalized career development plans (CDPs) that align individual employee aspirations with organizational needs. The authors argue that a well-designed CDP template streamlines this process, benefiting both employees and employers across dimensions of engagement, retention, and talent management. Key evidence includes a Gartner statistic claiming proactive career development support produces up to a 45% positive impact on how supported employees feel versus 8% from expectation-only approaches, a 34% higher retention rate for employees with development opportunities, a 2024 Gartner survey finding that 74% of managers are unprepared to lead change, and a claim that employees who move into new internal roles are 3.5 times more engaged. The article outlines six structured CDP components — current status assessment, career vision, gap identification, short-term goal setting, action planning, and progress tracking — and presents a sample plan for a software engineer. Conclusions drawn emphasize that structured CDP templates improve employer brand, enable succession planning, support data-driven talent decisions, and foster continuous learning cultures.

Key Insights

1. Proactively engaging employees on career growth produces up to a 45% positive impact on feelings of support, compared to just 8% when organizations only meet baseline expectations, according to Gartner data cited in the article.
2. Employees who move into new internal roles are described as 3.5 times more likely to be engaged and twice as likely to remain with the organization, positioning internal mobility as a key retention strategy.
3. A 2024 Gartner survey cited in the article found that HR leaders believe 74% of managers are not equipped to lead change, suggesting leadership development plans are an underserved organizational priority.

Practical Takeaways

- A career development plan structured around six elements — current status, career vision, development gaps, short-term goals, an action plan, and progress evaluation — provides a repeatable framework organizations can adapt to individual employee needs and career stages.
- Different employee profiles (new hires, high-potentials, individual contributors, succession candidates) warrant distinct CDP types, including onboarding plans, leadership development plans, succession-based growth plans, cross-functional stretch plans, and specialized technical track plans.

Frameworks Mentioned

SMART Goals — A goal-setting criterion requiring goals to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound, referenced in the context of setting short-term employee development targets.

360-Degree Review — Referenced as a feedback mechanism to evaluate employee progress and skills development within the career development planning process.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article provides a clear, actionable six-step CDP framework with a concrete software engineer example, making abstract concepts tangible for HR practitioners. It acknowledges diversity in employee career trajectories by presenting five distinct CDP types. **Limitations:** All statistics are sourced from Gartner or embedded within the article without direct citations to specific report titles or methodologies, limiting independent verification. The article conflates correlation and causation in several data claims, particularly regarding engagement and internal mobility. **Biases:** As a Leapsome publication, the article functions as a product marketing vehicle. Multiple sections contain direct product integration prompts ('Pro tip: Leapsome's Competency Frameworks...'), and a downloadable template is gated behind the Leapsome brand. The quote from Career and Business Coach Cynthia Orduña is not attributed to any published work, reducing its evidentiary weight. The SWOT analysis is mentioned once without elaboration, and the article does not address organizational constraints such as budget limitations, manager capability gaps, or structural barriers to internal mobility that could impede CDP implementation.

Organizational Practice

The article describes organizations using structured career development plan templates administered by HR professionals in collaboration with line managers. Practices include conducting employee self-assessments and SWOT analyses, setting SMART short-term goals aligned to long-term career visions, identifying competency gaps through performance reviews and job description benchmarking, assigning stretch assignments and internal shadowing opportunities, and conducting monthly manager check-ins and quarterly progress reviews. Recognition practices such as Slack 'wins' channels and Praise Walls are also noted as progress reinforcement mechanisms.

Strategic Implications

The article's framing of career development as a retention and engagement lever — supported by internal mobility and succession planning data — reflects a broader industry trend toward treating structured employee development as a measurable organizational capability rather than an ad hoc HR activity. The emphasis on five differentiated CDP types suggests organizations are moving away from one-size-fits-all development frameworks toward role- and stage-specific approaches. The repeated citation of manager unpreparedness for change leadership points to an emerging tension between the demand for leadership pipelines and current managerial capability levels, which may influence how organizations allocate L&D resources. The integration of competency frameworks with performance reviews and feedback cycles reflects a convergence between performance management and career development infrastructure.

