

7 steps to setting up employee career *paths* and *competencies*



Investing in employee development isn’t just the right thing for businesses to do; it’s the smart thing. Culture Amp’s research has shown that a lack of development is the #1 reason employees leave their organization.

Similarly, our people scientists have found that when managers don’t show an interest in their direct reports’ career aspirations, commitment and motivation decrease by ~20%.

By aligning employee career goals with larger business goals, you can craft a culture that motivates employees and drives performance. Set your people and your company up for success in the modern world of work with clearly defined career paths and competencies

Get started with these 7 proven steps.

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1 *Lay* the groundwork

Start with your end goal in mind. Know how this framework will benefit your organization. Consider:

- What does success look like?
- What roles or job families will it apply to?
- What business outcomes will it support?
- What competencies will be most critical for success?



TIP 1

Gather your project team. This is ideally a diverse (yet contained) project team with clear decision-maker/s.

2 *Design* your framework

Utilize proven design principles in your career path framework, such as:

- **Avoiding too much detail.** While granular frameworks are often helpful (and what some employees prefer), they are harder to create and maintain, which means they pose the risk of becoming mentally overwhelming.
- **Providing guidance** to ensure that employees understand how to use the framework to pinpoint and target their specific needs.

Decide on a structure

Consider upfront how the structure of your career paths will work so there is consistency across your organization. For example, how many roles, job levels, and proficiency levels do you need?

Set guidelines for content creation

Define guidelines for the creation of any competencies, role sets, and the framework. Strive to be economical – apply the minimum number of competencies possible to each employee.

3 *Create* job tracks, roles, and groups

Build out your job family architecture using the organizational structure you designed in step 2.

We recommend the following approach:

1. **Decide if you want to use an “All employees” job group alongside functional job groups.** An “All employees” job group describes roles that broadly apply to everyone, such as “individual contributor” and “people leader.” A functional job group describes a family of similar roles, for example, “HR,” “Engineering,” or “Sales.”
2. **Design job groups.** Map your organizational structure to define the broad functional job groups.

3. **Design tracks.** These will help you define likely pathways within a job group. Considerations include individual contributor vs. people leader and specialist vs. generalist.
4. **Design roles.** The number of roles in each track should be informed by your organizational structure and level of accountability for each role.

TIP 2

Start with a pilot – choose one business function first, and refine your process before rolling it out more widely.

4 *Build* your competencies

Have each project team review the competency principles before starting. We recommend the following steps:



Build shared competencies that apply to any job or role



Develop behavioral examples for the proficiency levels of each competency



Create job-specific competencies

5 Create your career framework

Map your competencies to your job roles, deciding on proficiency levels for each role. Ensure there is enough differentiation between the levels.

Refer to:

- Example position descriptions for that role
- Salary or grading criteria
- Advice from experts in that function to determine “what good looks like” for each role



6 Implement your career framework

Develop a communication plan, work with key stakeholders to get them on board, and update internal HR systems and processes.

Just as importantly, provide training and resources to employees. This may include training programs, online resources, job aids, and other materials. We recommend linking learning resources to each competency to improve proficiency. Options include Culture Amp’s [Skills Coach](#), Playbooks, and Go1 courses, as well as your own Learning Management System (LMS) or coaching platform.

Consider the “3 E’s” of learning to provide a holistic path to growth:

- **Experience:** On-the-job experiences that help employees grow (e.g., stretch tasks, special products, and mentoring others)
- **Exposure:** Learning through observation (e.g., working with a coach, seeking feedback, shadowing, and networking)
- **Education:** Structured learning (e.g., courses, books, and conferences)

Additionally, empower your employees to explore career paths in and outside of their own teams. Flexible, nonlinear career paths provide access to both upward and lateral moves, driving internal mobility and showing employees exciting ways to grow with your company.

TIP 3

Bring your career framework to life by encouraging managers to review career paths with their direct reports during 1) development plan creation and 2) regular development conversations.

7 Maintain your framework

Don’t let your hard work go to waste! Career paths are only as useful as they are relevant. Define a maintenance approach and obtain feedback to ensure ongoing relevance.



Unlock your employees’ full potential and drive performance at scale

As part of Develop, Career Paths by Culture Amp is a tool that makes it simple to develop your people into top performers. With a customizable competency library, powerful competency frameworks, role descriptions, and role tracks – all accessible from a centralized development hub, Career Paths empowers your people to excel in their current roles and motivates them to grow with the company.

“The beauty of having this tool [Career Paths] is that it outlines career paths and expectations across roles, helps employees better understand what’s expected of them in their current positions, and shows them what to focus on to prepare for future roles.”

Jennifer Shevlin

Senior Vice President of Human Resources
[Blueprint Medicines](#)

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