

These actionable strategies for individuals and organizations ensure ongoing, satisfying career growth for employees.

DECODING THE NEW CAREER LANDSCAPE



BY JULIE WINKLE GIULIONI
AND BEVERLY KAYE

Disruption is a term that's used with increasing frequency in today's workplace. From markets and strategy to innovation and technology—significant shifts and disturbances mean that it's no longer business as usual for most organizations. The core of many operating models is in a state of significant and sustained flux. And it's all necessary for organizations to evolve, survive, and thrive in today's dynamic environment.

This instability is not reserved for the C-suite. It radiates out to and through everything and everyone in an organization. Policies must evolve and structures must shift as the future becomes a bit of a moving target. All systems and processes are affected—especially career development.

Leaders and employees alike are coming to terms with the fact that business disruption naturally ushers in changes to roles, responsibilities, opportunities, possibilities, aspirations, and what the future may hold. Business disruption means career development disruption.

Confounding conditions

Our fast-changing workplace offers a kaleidoscope of conditions that render much of the traditional career development wisdom and tried-and-true advancement strategies completely outdated and useless.

Which have you noticed in your organization—or life?

- The face of the workforce is in flux. The number of traditional balance sheet employees is decreasing and shifting toward part-time, contract, consultant, and other contingent configurations.
- The former currency of career development—promotions and positions—plays an increasingly marginalized role, resulting from years of delaying, consolidating, and the like.
- The standard response to “How are you?” is “busy,” because everyone seems to be living in a time desert with little discretionary energy to invest in extraneous activity.
- Many lines today are dotted as a result of evolving organizational configurations, including such factors as the matrix, centers of excellence, and business partner relationships. This leaves employees wondering, “Who’s responsible for me and my development?”
- The work itself is organized in organic and frequently haphazard ways—around evolving opportunities and needs—and not always vetted through official channels.

- Jobs are no longer contained within the tidy envelopes of stable job descriptions; in fact, the envelopes are frequently overflowing with dynamically shifting contents.
- Flexible working conditions (the ability to work from anywhere at any hour of the day or night) are changing the calculus of connections and visibility.

The workplace and the work itself have changed dramatically. Cracking the code on career development today means fundamentally disrupting how we view growth and our relationship to it—on both an individual and organizational level.

Contemporary career success: What individuals can do

The idea of owning one’s career is nothing new; it’s been a popular expression for some time. What’s new is that organizations and leaders—overrun with countless other priorities—are taking it seriously. While some leaders find themselves desperately delegating development just to keep their heads above water, others are thoughtfully and supportively encouraging the agency and accountability (and offering the resources) that are required for employees to actively guide their own growth. They’re offering the resources people need to position themselves to pivot and progress in meaningful ways despite (or perhaps because of) unpredictable, uncertain circumstances. Individuals who want to seize this opportunity should consider the following strategies.

Trade job security for learning agility. Job security has been elusive and on the decline in recent years. The employment contract has been severed, and loyalty (on both sides) is dead. Continuing to chase stability in the form of a particular role, position, or organization is increasingly fruitless.

Learning agility is the new job security. Employees who want to own their development and drive it in a desirable direction need to shift their attention toward enhancing employability with key



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skills, capabilities, and experiences. They must look around the corner to anticipate changing needs.

At the same time, they must become constant, nimble, voracious learners—viewing the world as a learning lab and extracting lessons even from mundane events and sources. This is a mindset—and a skill set—supported by curiosity and deep reflection. And the more employees practice this brand of flexible, deft development, the easier and more accessible learning becomes, enhancing performance today and reducing time to productivity in the future as conditions change.

“Skate to where the puck is going.” Hockey player Wayne Gretzky’s famous advice is equally relevant to contemporary career development as it ever was to the game of hockey. Surviving and thriving in today’s disruptive environment means employees preparing for where they imagine or predict things may be going versus where they are today.

Jobs and needs will continue to change. With artificial intelligence and machine learning moving from science fiction to reality, some roles will become unnecessary. However, other new roles will emerge. In fact, the Institute for the Future reports that 85 percent of the jobs that will exist in 2030 haven’t yet been invented. As a result, individuals must work to anticipate the trajectory of future needs to the greatest extent possible, watch for developments, make peace with the uncertainty, and plan for responsibilities and opportunities that aren’t yet fully formed.

Change “not my job” thinking to “now my job” thinking. The seemingly exponential growth of workload for many is spawning a workforce of ferocious prioritizers. As time becomes an increasingly scarce commodity, too frequently employees are forced to make tough choices about what they can and can’t fit into their limited days. They crash on what’s mission critical, critical path, or those tasks required to stave off a critical manager. So, they ignore or decline opportunities that could promote growth because it’s not their job.

But development today demands that people find or unlock the bandwidth necessary to continue to grow in their current role. And that means transitioning from not-my-job to now-my-job thinking. This updated orientation recognizes that we have a responsibility to contribute to the organization—but also to ourselves. This orientation sees jobs as containers for learning and growth.

As soon as employees realize that they can (and should) actively leverage the roles they’re in for their development, they can take control by working with leaders to enhance their current responsibilities. Employees can actively seek out the opportunities to

NO CRYSTAL BALL REQUIRED

In a disruptive environment, strategic talent planning requires that individuals and organizations develop methods for anticipating what’s ahead even if the forecast is uncertain. Predicting and preparing for the future doesn’t require a crystal ball. What it does require is engaging everyone in disciplined approaches for scanning the horizon, exploring events, and putting individual insights and pieces together to generate a clearer picture of what’s to come.

That’s as easy as including activities like these in regular team meetings and calls:

Hold headline huddles. Ask your team to bring in headlines that worry them, scare them, excite them, or confuse them and that they would be willing to share for the work group to ponder. Ask how the headlines may change current work and future work—and career opportunities.

Sponsor industry insight conversations. Select some industry newsletters, magazines, or websites, and ask your team to scan them and look for industry-changing trends. Create a shared site or Google Doc where your team shares these trends, routinely reviews them, and discusses implications to the team and individual development.

Lean into laws and legislation. Invite your team to review some of the legislation that is in discussion at the state and national level. Consider the effects of their passage on the organization—and the downstream implications for people.

Aim at artificial intelligence. Begin an ongoing dialogue with your team about artificial intelligence with questions such as:

- What are some of the AI or machine learning trends headed our way?
- What parts of our work would lend themselves to greater automation?
- What are some outlandish ideas you have read about AI?

Taking a clear-eyed, curious view of the future is the only way that organizations will successfully navigate today’s environment, and it’s the only way that individuals will position themselves to continue to decipher the evolving career landscape.

enrich the portfolio of expertise and experience that will prepare them for the future. They can step into voids—that work that needs to be done but may not yet be recognized—or mine this “white space” for targeted development.

The organization’s role

Individual ownership of careers makes tremendous sense in this era of disruption. After all, employees know best who they are, what they want, and how all of this changes day by day. They’re also closest to the

COMPENSATION IN THE NEW CAREER LANDSCAPE

As annual pay increases have shrunk to the point of disappearing in some companies, people have come to understand that if they want to see a significant change in their paychecks, they're going to have to seek a promotion or similar move. This unfortunate dynamic has unintended consequences. We've all seen the exceptional individual contributor who pursues a supervisory role that she doesn't particularly enjoy (and frequently doesn't particularly excel at) because it's the only way to increase her salary.

However, in today's environment where development is being redefined and rebranded as growth within one's current role, the calculus is changing. Development that's not accompanied by a promotion or other move rarely comes with additional remuneration. And as attractive as growth for growth's sake is, employees will only take on so many developmental experiences before feeling that the burden outweighs the benefits—and before asking “What's in it for me?”

The result is organizations having to restructure compensation models and get creative. Many are implementing technical tracks that offer financial incentives for learning more and going deeper within a discipline. Some are experimenting with competency bonuses—one-time payments associated with achieving contracted developmental milestones. Still others are exploring nonfinancial ways to reward and celebrate growth through badges and certifications.

action and presumably best able to anticipate new directions and opportunities. But employees can only own their careers effectively to the extent that organizations provide the support and resources required for growth.

What served companies well in the past—those administratively burdensome individual development planning systems—are going the way of the dinosaur. What's replacing them are alternatives that are as disruptive as the environment they're designed to support.

Crowdsource career development. Traditionally, career development was a relationship between the individual and his supervisor (in some luminary organizations, a coach or mentor was thrown into the mix). But today, even if leaders have the time, are they best suited to guide someone's development? Do they see and know enough to be their employees' sole career lifeline?

Imagine what would be possible if the traditional one-to-one model became a one-to-many approach. This would require shifting the organizational perspective about who supports development. Rather than isolated (and isolating) individual development planning sessions, what if the manager and employee expanded the guest list? For example, growth gatherings are structured conversations that bring multiple co-workers, stakeholders, and network members together to jointly and supportively engage in a career dialogue. These gatherings would enable individuals to more broadly consider development opportunities and possible actions that would serve them best.

Crowdsourcing development planning to include those with knowledge of and commitment to the employee could fundamentally alter the quantity and quality of development in organizations. Further, deputizing more people through this type of a process drives support for growth more deeply, broadly, and closely to the employee and his point of need.

Democratize learning. Three forces have converged to democratize learning in many companies. First, employers are experiencing tremendous pressure for employees to continue to perform in new and better ways, thus elevating the need for learning. Second, the ubiquitous nature of information outside the workplace (we can figure just about anything out via Google and YouTube) has heightened the workers' expectations to be able to access learning when and how they need it at work. And finally, disruption in the technology field has enabled disruptive tools and approaches in the training and development field. Online, virtual, and on-demand modalities allow learning to scale to broader audiences. Information and insights are just a click away—for anyone, anytime, anywhere.

In addition to offering learning via online and on-demand resources, employers must further democratize and personalize learning by supporting on-the-job experiences. Development experiences and experiments conducted within the context of a person's current job can be among the most effective (and cost-effective) ways to help people grow—only when companies link the development activities to a growth focus, intentionally constructed and tailored to address that focus, supported and appropriately resourced, and debriefed to capture and crystalize learning. To democratize learning and enable career development while supporting the business, managers and employees must learn to master the ability to leverage experiences for the purposes of targeted learning.

Challenge the boundaries of the old job. In today's dynamic environment, organizations can't

afford to create roles that become pigeonholes for their employees. Greater agility and fluidity must become the cornerstone of job design. That's the only way individuals will be able to flex to meet changing business expectations and meet their own expectations for development.

Given the flattening and delayering many businesses experience, promotions and even lateral moves are fewer and farther between. As a result, it's increasingly necessary for an employee to frame her current role as the best and most immediate vehicle for development. Note that this requires a fundamentally different mental model; clear lines of demarcation among jobs must blur. Jobs of the future, the ones that enable business results and development concurrently, may take on more of an amoeba-like form with semipermeable membranes and organic boundaries that stretch, contract, and absorb opportunities. This is all in

response to new information, different opportunities, and changing conditions.

While disruption ushers in new levels of uncertainty, complexity, and unpredictability, it also offers tremendous opportunities. New markets, products, and delivery models. And new ways of approaching what matters most to employees: their careers.

Julie Winkle Giulioni helps organizations enhance learning, engagement, retention, and the bottom line through keynotes, facilitated sessions, and custom training. She is co-author, with Beverly Kaye, of *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go: Career Conversations Organizations Need and Employees Want*; juliewg@pacbell.net.

Beverly Kaye is recognized internationally as an authority in the areas of career development, employee engagement, and retention; bev@bevkaye.com.

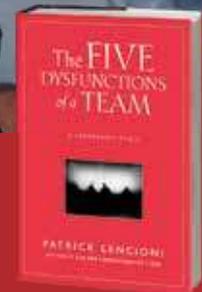


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