



**SIDEWAYS IS**



**THE NEW UP**

Using Talent Mobility to Bring Out the Best  
in Employees and Your Organization

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# You Have a Secret Weapon (That You're Probably Not Using)

The employment landscape was relatively static for years. Sure, there were changes, but employers and employees could count on the traditional hire-to-retain career path. And while that path hasn't always taken place at one company, the idea was still the same: get a job, improve your skills, move into a higher position, repeat until you retire. Employers thought employees valued vertical moves, and ever-vertical salaries that moved one way—up. Employees either didn't know any better, didn't think about it, or didn't think there were options. The few employees who were dissatisfied with the status quo braved the entrepreneur path, with uncertain success but potentially brighter futures.

But things have changed, significantly. The crash of 2008 not only devastated countries, companies, and families, it also shook the foundation of the employment model. This had begun years before, with increased mergers, countless acquisitions, and volatile markets. But if there's anything positive about the devastation of those few years, it's that people began looking more closely at what mattered to them beyond the numbers.

For the generation newest to the workforce in 2008, Millennials, the crash would completely alter their perspective on what was valuable about work. If they couldn't find employment that paid well—and most Millennials couldn't—they would find work that enabled more meaning, personal satisfaction, and a higher sense of purpose. It's still the same today: 60% of Millennials state that “a sense of purpose is part of the reason they chose to work at their current employer.”<sup>1</sup> And it's not just Millennials. Boomers and GenXers also began to value meaning of their jobs more than ever before.



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In the beginning, this shift in perspective benefitted employers, who now had their pick of talent. These candidates not only wanted jobs, but as wages were in freefall, were willing to take positions for a lower salary in exchange for the opportunity to try something new, follow a passion, or work with different people.

But today, as Josh Bersin has said, the war for talent is over—and companies have lost. The traditional carrots of salary, time off, and benefits can't attract or retain the best and the brightest or the most engaged and passionate. The younger workforce may be leading the charge in looking for more meaning on the job, but GenXers and Boomers aren't far behind. That puts employers in the precarious position of having to appeal to all generations with better offers, amid pickier employees and increased competition for skills.

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*It gets worse.* Organizations obviously don't have unlimited budgets to find or keep the right talent. Acquisition costs have to stay low, and leaders have to be trained faster, because the market landscape is also more competitive. Those people who used to want a job with your company are just as likely to become the upstart competition, as it's easier than ever before to disrupt the status quo with nothing more than a mobile app and a home office.

So what's an executive to do when skilled talent demands more opportunities and meaning, Boomers are retiring and taking their knowledge—and their work ethic—with them, and upstarts can become marketplace big shots in mere months?

Amplify your talent management strategy with the executive's secret weapon: **talent mobility**.

# Talent Mobility is a Differentiator and a Driver of Success

Talent mobility is now one of the biggest differentiators driving organizational success. Research conducted by Lee Hecht Harrison revealed that 81% of organizations actively practicing talent mobilization (“committed talent mobilizers”) experience “on or above target revenue growth compared to 68% of other organizations.”<sup>3</sup>

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Talent mobility enables organizations to more organically, quickly, and proactively move employees around the organization, vertically and horizontally, to ensure individual skills, talents, and competencies are when and where they are most needed. And it isn't a one-sided endeavor. It serves to harness existing employee goals, competencies, and passions and matches these more effectively with opportunities in the organization. It's a truly symbiotic act that benefits both organizations and employees.

Because it's about using what you have (in-house talent) and placing them in the right place, at the right time, talent mobility addresses executives' four biggest challenges around finding and keeping great people. With talent mobility, organizations

- improve visibility and transparency
- acquire talent more efficiently and at less cost
- develop leaders faster and at all levels
- engage employees

## Improve visibility and transparency

With talent management, visibility is everything. And that's why spreadsheets, which are great for adding up short stacks of numbers, are really terrible tools for tracking and reporting on training, performance, and succession. So executives today rely on unified talent management strategies to know not only who is on the team, but how they perform, what they're learning, and if their scores show they're ready for new challenges.

But even the holy grail of managing the employee lifecycle—the unified talent management system—can't give you the real transparency and visibility of your workforce unless you add two key variables. It sounds like a physics lesson, but your big picture of your workforce—and even your ability to predict what you need and when—depend on the elements of time and space.

Talent management practiced without talent mobility looks at what you need, finds those skills gaps, and even assigns training and correlates performance with succession. But while talent management may identify employees ready to move up, it doesn't always efficiently track, analyze, or deliver insight into who can and want to move laterally, for the long-term or temporarily. This is fine for traditional succession planning, but it's not so great for getting things done day to day with the best people with the right skills, without looking outside.

➔ Talent mobility gives organizations more insight into talent, more places to place that talent, and more opportunities to determine how those placements can solve shortages, engage employees, and build leaders.

Building your organization's workforce around talent mobility, nested within a unified talent management strategy, is like going from 3D to mind-blowing 4D (that's the time element). While setting up a talent mobility component requires your team to add more information to the mix, these variables give the organization more insight into talent, more places to place that talent, and more opportunities to determine how those placements can solve shortages, engage employees, and build leaders.

## Acquire talent more efficiently and at less cost

You invest significantly in acquiring new employees. While this is both necessary and beneficial, it's also time consuming. Relying heavily on outside talent, instead of balancing hires between external and internal candidates, is also tough on your acquisition budget—and your productivity. Because it takes time for even the greatest new employee to adapt to new surroundings, new people, and new tasks, organizations can lose precious weeks, or even months, of productivity and profits.

On the flip side, in-house talent already knows your culture, your product, and your people. You understand them, they understand you. But even your super stars can begin to feel less challenged or frustrated with the status quo. Old-school talent management would say give them training to improve their outlook on their current position. But add in the super power of talent mobility, and you can both train them and move them around the company to where their skills are not only needed but where they are a much better fit.

The truth is, you need acquisition strategies that help you find both: the best internal and the best external talent. When you look at the hard numbers, talent mobility, when added to your existing recruiting strategy, is about lowering acquisition costs overall. Because you can spend less on mobilizing that internal talent—and fill crucial vacancies faster—you have more capacity to source the external candidates that are truly the best fit for your skills gaps, culture, and goals.

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In the long-term, using a talent mobility strategy in tandem with your external recruiting solution is about creating an organization that has both cultural longevity and the capacity for growth and diversity. One executive search firm—a company that has a strong financial interest in organizations relying on outside talent—states that internal promotions are crucial to the entire recruitment industry's success. Internal hires not only have the necessary institutionalized knowledge, but the firm itself states that it is “virtually impossible to consistently recruit top talent to an organization that fails to regularly promote from within.”<sup>5</sup>

New hires can invigorate a workplace and provide it with additional pathways to innovation. But when organizations mobilize internal employees, the existing workforce is apt to be more loyal, be more secure (and less likely to leave), and invest more personally in the organization's success.

## Develop leaders faster and at all levels

Increased business and growth increases the demand for leaders. And trained leaders just aren't available—yet. This is partly because Boomers are retiring too quickly to replace them, and because succession planning has taken a backseat for a very long time, except for at the highest levels. In Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends 2015, research showed:

- only 6% of organizations thought their leadership pipeline was “very ready”<sup>6</sup>
- a mere 32% of organizations stated they had a “steady supply of leaders at the top levels”<sup>7</sup>
- 51% of organizations state that their succession programs are “weak” or nonexistent<sup>8</sup>

This means developing leaders through traditional succession planning alone won't ensure your best people are ready to be those leaders when and where you need them next.

➔ Because truly great leaders understand more than their own departments, the ability to move them through the organization, vertically and laterally, speeds up the learning curve and creates leaders that have a wider understanding of the entire organization.

Talent mobility addresses succession—and thus the leadership shortage—in powerful ways. First, it helps build better leaders through efficient exposure to more of the company. While traditional training is important, 70% of people learn their jobs on the job. Leaders are no different. Because truly great leaders understand more than their own departments, the ability to move them through the organization, vertically and laterally, speeds up the learning curve and creates leaders that have a wider understanding of the entire organization. According to Mercer, while leadership training courses build “skills, culture, and behavior,” talent mobility, in the form of international and rotational assignments, develops “organizational breadth.”<sup>9</sup>

Talent mobility and multi-functional teams also ensure that younger generations have the opportunity to develop management and governing skills earlier. While there may not be enough vertical opportunities for this younger generation to practice leadership skills, there are myriad lateral and rotational moves that can serve the same purpose and prepare them for future roles.<sup>10</sup>



## Engage employees

You're worried about engagement. And rightly so. Consider this: Gallup's 2016 daily survey of employees shows that during any given week, only 36% of employees felt engaged at work.<sup>11</sup> That means more than two-thirds of your workforce is probably not engaged.

While a few years ago engagement consisted of a few lunches out with the boss, a ping-pong table, and beer on Fridays, organizations have begun offering learning opportunities and more frequent performance feedback. Yet it's still not enough. It's an employee's market out there, and engaging employees today requires mobility and meaning. Talent mobility enables your organization to more clearly demonstrate its investment in your people by providing them with not just up opportunities but also experiences that broaden their thinking and understanding of the entire company.

By experiencing more of the organization, its roles, its goals, and its struggles, employees feel like they're part of something bigger and thus are integrally more invested in the success of your organization. And while historically a disengaged employee may have left your organization to explore new opportunities or tried to become an entrepreneur to try out their tangential ideas, talent mobility helps retain these future leaders and drive innovation for your organization.

Employees also want career paths with meaning that fulfill a myriad of goals, including purpose, passion, growth, income, and life-work balance. Talent mobility provides employees with opportunities to build new skills, learn new departments, and find out what their dream job really is.

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# What Next?

So if talent mobility can help solve executives' four big challenges—visibility, acquisition, leadership, and engagement—why are less than half of organizations taking advantage of it?<sup>12</sup>

Because it's hard—or seems to be at first glance. In the 2015 Talent Mobility Research Report, 24% of organizations listed their top talent mobility challenge as a “lack of organizational understanding of what Talent Mobility is and how it can be leveraged.” Overall, this was in the top three challenges for 53% of respondents.<sup>13</sup> Respondents also thought organizations weren't prioritizing talent mobility (42%), and perhaps most critically, 34% thought that organizations weren't giving stakeholders the right tools to implement and practice talent mobility.

Yet that last statistic is actually good news for you. The tools that your employees need to develop and deploy a talent mobility strategy are the tools you already have—or are ones that you are in the process of implementing. Talent mobility requires transparency and visibility into your entire workforce, something that a unified talent management strategy—and system—already delivers. This puts you ahead of the game, as the 2015 Talent Mobility Research Report states that organizations must, if they haven't already, create “a single point of access for the organization's entire talent mobility infrastructure.”<sup>14</sup> This infrastructure must include learning, internal recruiting, performance management, and career planning tools, as well as collaboration and connection capabilities.

- ➔ Talent mobility requires transparency and visibility into your entire workforce, something that a unified talent management strategy—and system—already delivers.

## 5 Steps to Getting Started With Your Talent Mobility Strategy

**1. Set the stage.** As an executive, you're in a position to start the conversation. Bring in other executives, managers, and your HR team to start creating consensus around your organization's need for talent mobility and brainstorm on how it can be best achieved. This isn't the time to create a concrete plan but rather an opportunity to get everyone onboard and on the same page.

**2. Take a good look at your existing workforce and expected shortages.**

Your talent management platform contains a wealth of insight into employee competencies and goals, organizational skill and position gaps (now and in the future), and how these pieces of information correlate. Forget the mindset of "move up" and start looking at "moving across." This shift in perception will immediately and exponentially bring to light more opportunities for employees and the organization.

**3. Get clear about organizational goals.** The point of talent mobility is to move talent where it's needed and most useful, thereby saving resources and further engaging employees. Yet at the end of the day, it's really about meeting the organization's goals faster, more efficiently, and at less cost, with the end result of greater success. Goals for this year, next year, and three years from now must be well-defined from the beginning.

**4. Begin communicating with your workforce about the potential for mobility.**

Think of it like a slow nurture campaign: you're not hitting them over the head with a new initiative coming down from on high. Instead, you're slowly spreading the word that you're looking at ways to provide employees with new career opportunities, more meaning, and additional skill building activities within the organization. Emphasize that talent mobility enables your workforce to fulfill their goals faster, because mobility is not just about upward movement but lateral, rotational, and short-term, as well. This is the time to also set the stage for increased transparency around the entire process.

**5. Set your HR team up for success with any additional tools or support they need.**

Your team may already have an internal recruiting system, but do they have a connection tool to encourage networking between in-house talent? They may be using a learning management system to develop employees, but do they also have the capability to make those development opportunities truly collaborative?

And what about access to in-depth analytics? Talent mobility only works in the long term if there are metrics that identify successes and highlight areas that need improvement. Predictive analytics are coming to the forefront, as well. As the proverbial crystal ball, predictive analytics are designed to deliver future-time insight into your talent, your organization, and the marketplace. Soon you'll easily be able to make smarter long-term decisions with data that predicts the possible fates of your current career mobility and succession strategies—and how to adapt them to the changes ahead.

# Talent Mobility Brings Out the Best in Employees—and the Best in Organizations

In the next few years, talent mobility is going to be the big differentiator when it comes to organizational profits and longevity. A mere two years ago, Weichert's 2014 Workforce Mobility Survey demonstrated that organizations that have 5% or larger increases in revenue by year rely on talent mobility as an organizational and employee building strategy, e.g., addressing career development in addition to meeting staffing needs.<sup>15</sup> Mobility will enable organizations to not only stay profitable and productive in the face of talent shortages, but create work cultures that bring out the very best in employees. When employees feel valued and have the opportunity to fulfill their own career goals alongside the organization's, they're more motivated and simply happier. This translates to not just increased retention, but the ability to harness the very best of your workforce, their creativity, their motivation, and their capacity for innovation.



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