

# Talk The Talk: How Ongoing Career Conversations Drive Business Success

Increase Employee Engagement And Performance By Embedding Ongoing Career Conversations Into Your Organizational Culture



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# ABOUT THE RESEARCH

*The Right Management Global Career Conversation Study was conducted November-December 2015 to develop a deeper understanding of employee's perceptions about managing their careers across geographic regions, gender and age groups. Our 4,402 respondents represented 15 countries (Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States) and ranged in age from 25 to 55. We surveyed both individual contributors and managers on the following areas: What are the most important questions employees have about their careers? How do employees feel about the way they are being developed? Who do employees speak to for career advice? In what ways do development and high quality Career Conversations translate into important individual and organizational outcomes?*

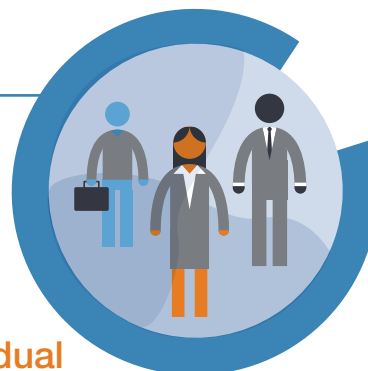
# OVERVIEW

## Challenge

It's clear that converging economic, technological, and demographic changes are creating talent challenges for organizations, for managers and for individual employees. **Skilled individuals**, particularly those in short supply, have **greater leverage to dictate terms of employment** to their potential employers—how, where and when they want to work. They are trading employer-created job stability and traditional corporate pathways for an opportunity to chart and manage careers on their own terms, designing a “Career for Me.” In fact, 89% of respondents in a recent Right Management survey said “they are or need to be responsible for the development of their career.”<sup>1</sup> As employees take greater control, they **consistently report that they expect to move to other companies for growth and advancement opportunities** to increase their value to future employers.<sup>2</sup> In this new environment of individually owned career management, an employer can participate in, influence, and gain value from an employee's career journey but they cannot control it.

89%

of employees believe they are or need to be responsible for the development of their career.



**2/3** of individual performance drivers are tied to career conversations

So, how does an organization engage such an employee while meeting its own business objectives and goals? And, how does an organization manage employees who do not recognize their responsibility to maintain relevant skills, still believing they can keep doing what they have always done regardless of changing expectations, technologies and roles. **The answer lies in reinventing the “Career Conversation.”** Our research shows that **a full two-thirds of individual performance drivers are tied to Career Conversations**, making it the most important people process in an organizational culture that embraces career development.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Right Management, Global Career Conversation Study, 2016

<sup>2 & 3</sup> Right Management, Australia Career Study, 2012

The career conversation is not a single conversation. It is a series of conversations designed to help answer the questions employees most care about:



Who am I? How do I fit?



What is expected of me?



What and how should I develop?



How am I doing?



How will my talents and contributions be recognized?



What's next for me?



## Right Management's View

Talent has become the most important competitive differentiator for organizations today. Creating a culture that encourages career management will help an organization **attract and engage the brightest talent**, while also encouraging all employees to take charge of their careers. While meaningful work connects employees to an organization and its success, it is not enough. To **foster deeper engagement** and productivity, that work has to be embedded in a culture that invests in employees' careers, enables informed career decisions, and demands individual accountability for career growth. This requires organizations to **actively facilitate a learning journey** designed to help employees develop new capabilities and knowledge while providing longer term career growth opportunities.

While Career Conversations are useful for all employees, two groups in particular will derive great benefit from this process. The first is comprised of your "stars" — top performers, high potentials, and those with in-demand skills in critical roles. Having candid career discussions with talented individuals acknowledges their value to the organization and helps to establish their personal aspirations. While the temptation may be to shy away from such discussions for fear of stoking employee desires for "greener pastures," Career Conversations are actually an effective strategic approach to engaging and retaining top performers.

The second group primed for Career Conversations are employees whose skills are in lower demand and higher supply. **As the world of work changes, job requirements are changing as well.** Every organization today must manage a subset of their workforce whose skills are becoming obsolete and job prospects — both within and outside the company — are slipping away. **A Career Conversation is a valuable platform** to raise such issues within the context of the employee's immediate and long-term prospects. It can be a valuable, and welcome, wake-up call for individuals who either fail to see or cannot face their increasingly precarious employment prospects.

Done well, the Career Conversation provides the perfect opportunity to align employee's motivations and aspirations with the organization's need to remain agile, adaptable, and responsive to a complex and evolving marketplace.

## To Engage Me, Talk To Me About My Career

It is clear that the most important action employers can take to engage talent and improve individual and organizational performance is to help create and facilitate the employee's career journey, whether this is ultimately within or outside the organization.

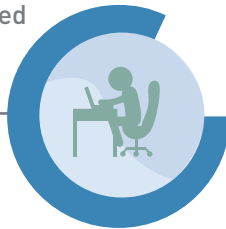
**Empowering an employee to become more proactive in crafting the next steps of their career fosters more than just engagement.**

Respondents in a recent Right Management survey report that regular Career Conversations would make them more likely to engage with their work, share ideas, and look for career growth and longevity in their current organization. Such conversations, they say, would help them align their aspirations with organizational goals and plan accordingly.<sup>4</sup>

### If Career Conversations Were More Regular...

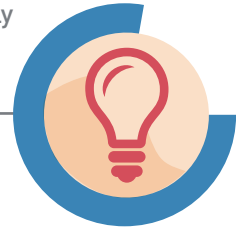
I would be more engaged with the work that I do

82%



I would be more likely to share my ideas

78%



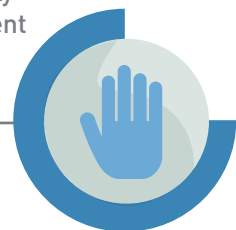
I would be more likely to look for opportunities for career growth at my current employer

76%



I would be more likely to stay with my current employer

75%



**Companies that embed the Career Conversation process into their organizational culture will benefit as well. Employee engagement will increase, translating into heightened individual and organizational performance.**

Productivity rates are likely to rise. It will become easier to retain key talent. The process will help reshape the workforce so the company has the right skills in place to meet evolving market and business imperatives. Lateral mobility will increase as employees are empowered to discover opportunities in different areas of the organization, resulting in a more agile workforce and a keener competitive edge.

<sup>4</sup> Right Management, Global Career Conversation Study, 2016

## The Career Conversation

Most employees want to advance their careers. For some, progress will mean moving upwards for more interesting work and greater responsibilities. For others, it may mean moving across organizational boundaries into new experiences and roles. As **individuals seek to develop their capabilities** in meaningful ways, **Career Conversations become the cornerstone** in a self-managed career.

Unfortunately, many organizations have downplayed the idea of Career Conversations due to managers' lack of skills and/or fear of talking about career progression with employees. In fact, only 16% of employees say they have ongoing conversations with their managers about their career.<sup>5</sup> The main reason that Career Conversations are not occurring more frequently is because most managers will do anything to avoid them. Here are the most common reasons for this trend:

### Main Reasons Most Managers Avoid Career Conversations

1. Many managers believe that career conversations will lead to expectations they cannot satisfy and will inevitably cost money in terms of employees looking for a promotion. They don't realize that many employees simply want to grow in their current role and be given an opportunity to move laterally.
2. Most managers have never been given training to support employees' career development
3. Most do not understand the cost-benefit imperative of having such conversations, and are not incented or held accountable for initiating them.

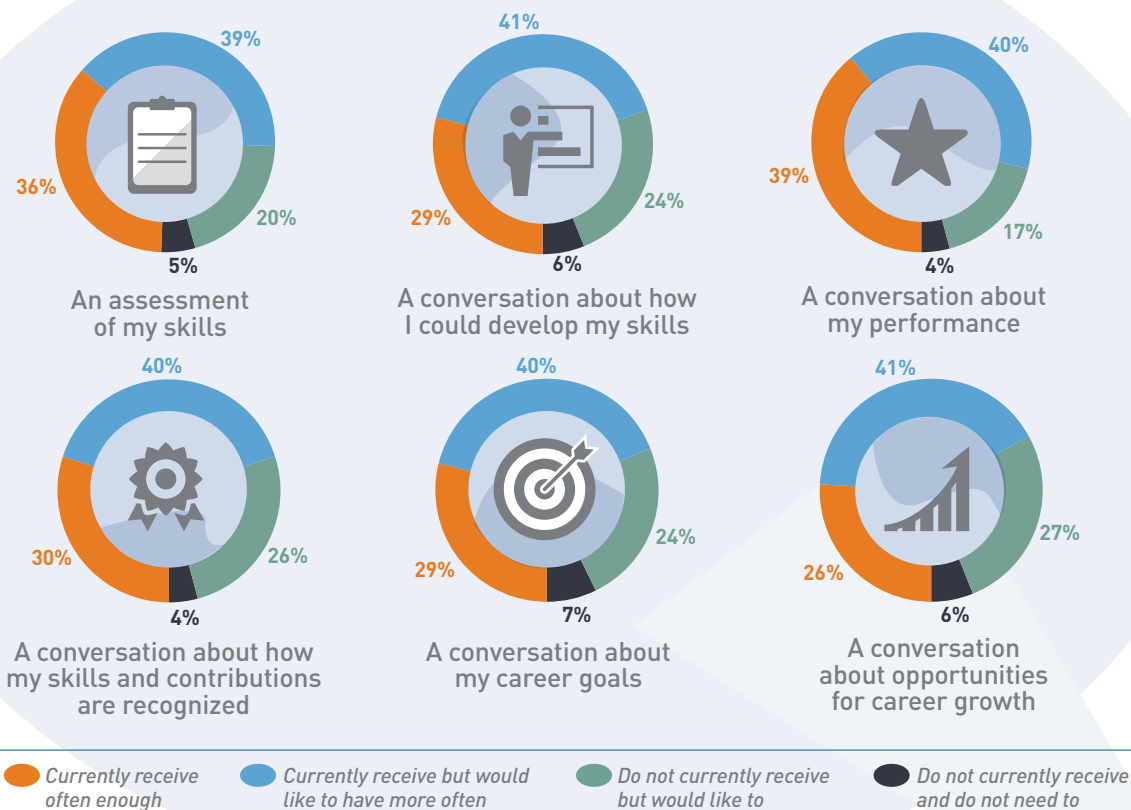
Managerial reluctance to play an active role in career development is unfortunate since organizations today need precisely the type of employees who put the greatest value on Career Conversations — namely, talent and those with in-demand skill sets for critical jobs. **Organizations that ignore the need to address the career development needs of their employees do so at their own peril.**

“ ONLY 16% OF EMPLOYEES INDICATE THAT THEY HAVE ONGOING CONVERSATIONS WITH THEIR MANAGERS ABOUT THEIR CAREER. ”

<sup>5</sup> Right Management, Global Career Conversation Study, 2016

Organizations and in particular direct managers, often assume that a little “career talk” can be dropped into a performance review process and that is sufficient for facilitating critical Career Conversations between a manager and employee. But when asked, the majority of **employees are looking for more information and advice** about a wide range of topics related to navigating a Career for Me.

## Navigating A Career For Me



The Career Conversation should answer the questions employees care about most in order to facilitate thinking about their personal career journey. For employees, it is more than a simple “add-on” to the performance management process; it is **a set of conversations designed to guide the future of their working life.** For that reason organizations need to give the Career Conversation as much time and attention as employees do. **More than ever, we need a new model for addressing the career needs of employees as a way of ensuring organizational, manager and individual goals are met.**

## A Purposeful Career Conversation Process Is Designed To Address Employee Career Development Needs

### Who Am I? How Do I Fit?



Self-discovery is an important first step in a self-managed career. **This first conversation is designed to help the employee clarify their career goals, and their match with values, motivations and abilities.** This discovery phase is designed to help the employee to identify personal strengths and development needs, to understand how others' perceive them, and clarify the success factors needed to achieve their career goals.

These along with insights gained from a conversation about expectations form the basis for a discussion about development.

### What Is Expected Of Me?



Employees want clear goals that are achievable and developmental. The organization, in turn, wants to assure that employee goals are aligned with the current and future needs of the business.

Using **SMART goals**, a manager can clarify the work that needs to get done within a specified period of time. This conversation is also an opportunity to confirm hidden capabilities that could be leveraged in new and different ways.

**S**



**SPECIFIC**

What am I responsible for?

**M**



**MEASURABLE**

How will I be assessed?

**A**



**ACHIEVABLE**

Challenging but attainable.

**R**



**RELEVANT**

Is it worth while... does it meet business needs, fit my role and enable my development?

**T**

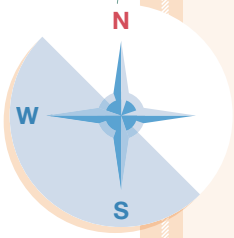


**TIME-BOUND**

Linked to a time frame.

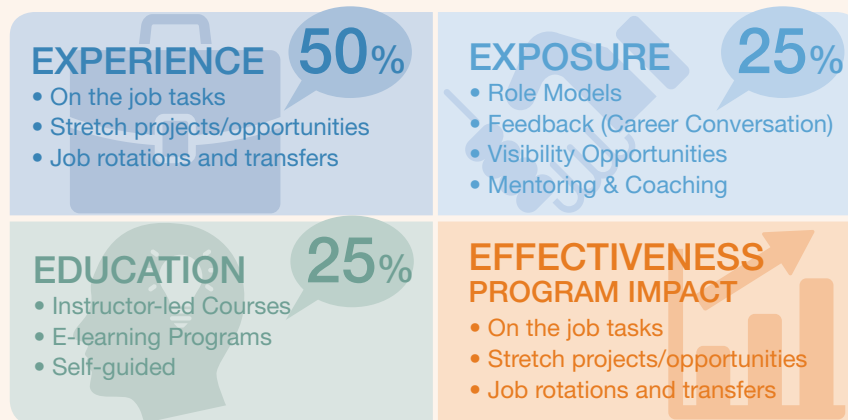


## What And How Should I Develop?



When talking about development, there are three perspectives that help to shape this conversation for employees.

- 1. Skills and knowledge required for effective performance in the current role.** The insights that feed this conversation flow naturally from a conversation about “what is expected of me.” Most development conversations focus on “what” is required for present performance needs. Discussing “how” is the bridge to effective action. A proven methodology for skills development is Right Management’s **50/25/25 guideline**:



For sustained behavior change, employees learn best when 50% is experiential (on-the-job tasks, stretch projects, job rotations), 25% is through exposure (feedback, role models, mentoring, coaching), and 25% is gained through education (instructor-led courses, e-learning, self-study). The other essential is measurement—measuring the impact on individual and organizational performance.

- 2. Skills and knowledge required for a future role.** This is an equally important perspective on development. Leveraging insights gained through the self-discovery process, employees can begin to explore the types of future roles that might be right for them. It’s the first step in imagining “what’s next?”
- 3. Skills and knowledge required to remain employable.** For some employees, career development—whether within the current organization or in another company—will require a retooling of their skills and reimagining of their functional role. The Career Conversation can be the first step in laying out a developmental pathway that will help them adjust to new market conditions and acquire the skills to transition to a new role.

## How Am I Doing?



The question “How am I doing?” is handled optimally through an **ongoing conversation about development between manager and employee**. This may involve a variety of other people (e.g., peers, other managers, internal clients and/or customers) who are well positioned to observe behavior and provide feedback at the moment of need.

In contrast, the “How did I do?” conversation is an evaluation conversation and is typically answered as part of a formal performance management process.

## How Will My Talents And Contributions Be Recognized?



“How will I be recognized?” often becomes an awkward conversation about money.

In reality, this conversation is designed to discover two very important insights. **First it is an opportunity for meaningful dialogue about what intrinsic motivations engage the employee, and how those might change over time.**

Knowing this, a manager can create a customized approach to motivate each employee, encourage and develop their capabilities and help them gain broader organization awareness.

In our experience, the concept of Personal Branding can play a critical role in furthering the employee’s recognition within the organization. A Personal Brand can be conveyed with a concise statement that communicates who the employee is and what he or she has to offer. Building a Personal Brand, sharing it with managers and colleagues for feedback, and leveraging it to demonstrate value to the company are key to navigating a career effectively. A Personal Brand also telegraphs the employee’s career intentions and expectations to managers and to the organization as a whole, and thus can serve as a litmus test for the long-term viability of the relationship.

## What's Next For Me?



“What’s next?” is **a collaborative conversation between the employee, his or her manager, and the broader organization**. The conversation starts by creating a shared understanding of the business landscape. Acting as a coach, managers can then facilitate a process to help employees imagine and explore paths through the organization that will enable them to fulfill their career goals, and identify the first steps in the process to get there.



“ IN THIS WAY, ORGANIZATIONS BECOME ALLIES WITH THEIR EMPLOYEES IN RECOGNIZING THE FULL SCOPE OF EACH INDIVIDUAL’S KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, ABILITIES, EXPERIENCES, TRAINING AND INTERESTS AND IN DEFINING A CAREER THAT BENEFITS BOTH THE ORGANIZATION AND THE INDIVIDUAL. ”

## Sources Of Career Advice

Employees tell us that they talk with a wide range of people for help in managing their careers. No one individual possesses all of the information required to navigate the future; each will have a very different perspective on the world of work. From an organizational perspective it's valuable to understand the sources employees are using as part of their "Career For Me" network.

Our research reveals that the **most important sources of career advice for employees are direct managers and work colleagues** as well as family and friends.<sup>6</sup> The leading source of career assistance is the direct manager. Not a surprise, given that 59% of employees surveyed believe that their manager is responsible for helping them achieve their career goals inside the organization.<sup>7</sup> This underscores the importance of equipping managers with the skills and tools that enable them to act as effective coaches in the Career Conversation process. Furthermore, we need to recognize that family and friends continue to play a very powerful role in this process, offering career advice and networking. Engaging employees in a series of high quality conversations on an ongoing basis is a powerful way to understand all of the elements, including the external influences that impact employee career decisions.

### In What Ways Do These Individuals Help You With Your Career Development?

*According to our research, these are the key sources individuals seek out for career assistance, development and guidance.*

	Career Advice	Mentoring	Learning & Development	Exposure to Job Opportunities	Networking
Direct Manager	X	X	X	X	
Human Resource Staff			X		
Work Colleagues	X	X	X		X
Internal Mentor		X	X		X
Family and Friends	X				X

“THE SUCCESS OF A CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IS HEAVILY WEIGHTED ON THE BEHAVIOR OF THE DIRECT MANAGER.”

<sup>6 & 7</sup> Right Management, Global Career Conversation Study, 2016

## What Do Employees Need?

Feel confident starting the Career Conversation

30%



Employees that would like to receive training on starting the Career Conversation

53%



While the primary ownership for career development rests squarely with the employee, only 30% of managers and individual contributors feel confident in their ability to start the Career Conversation process. It's no surprise that 53% of all employees surveyed would like to receive training.<sup>8</sup> With the success of a career development process heavily weighted on the behavior of the direct manager, we believe **it is important to train both managers and employees** and provide a rich array of support resources and tools. While over half of the employees surveyed have access to skills assessments, few organizations provide a robust set of development tools. A majority of both managers and individual contributors surveyed indicate they do not have these critical resources:

- Development plans and programs
- Skill-building experiences
- Mentoring and coaching
- Networking opportunities

Without basic skills and tools, how can we expect managers to champion the organization's most important people process?

### To Help With Development Does Your Employer Provide The Following?

A formal assessment of my strengths and development needs	55%
Project based work assignments	47%
New work experiences	38%
Technical skill development programs	38%
A career development plan	37%
Contract with senior leaders in the organization	37%
Networking opportunities	34%
A career path or map which outlines career alternatives	30%
Access to a coach	29%
Formal mentoring programs	29%
Formal mentoring programs with peers	27%

<sup>8</sup> Right Management, Global Career Conversation Study, 2016

## How Should Human Resources Evolve to Provide Greater Value

Viewing them simply as “process developers, benefits and payroll,” employers and employees alike often **underestimate the value human resources (HR) professionals** can bring to the Career Conversation process. Like our survey respondents, most employees see HR as the go-to partner for learning and development support. As capability builders, HR also can materially impact the quality of the Career Conversation process by training managers how to conduct meaningful, productive, and sometimes courageous Career Conversations and by training employees on how to manage their own career development. As hands-on business partners, HR professionals are often in a position to offer broad insights on opportunities for career development as well as how to navigate the politics of the organization.

### CASE STUDY

#### Human Resources As Capability Builders



#### Challenge: How To Get Serious About Career Development

For several years, a multinational manufacturer of medical devices, pharmaceuticals and consumer packaged goods received negative feedback on engagement surveys around career development and advancement opportunities.

#### Solution: Practical Assistance For Employees And Managers

Right Management developed a Career Directions program customized to the organization's business and talent strategy. Managers were trained how to have ongoing Career Conversations with their reports and show them how to take greater control of their career direction. **Employees were given an online portal to:**

- Access one-on-one coaching
- Uncover their career goals and motivations, and create an action plan for development
- Develop a personal brand and create professional resumés
- Hone their job interview skills with virtual interviewing simulations via video

“ I just received a major promotion to a senior management position. Without help in identifying and effectively communicating my key strengths, I don't feel I would have been able to advance to this type of position. -Career Directions program participant ”

#### Results

- Participation has doubled year over year
- The program has expanded to more global locations and business units
- Participants are leveraging the support to foster Career Conversations and identify internal opportunities for growth

# IN CONCLUSION

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## Driving A Culture Of Individual And Organizational Success

A Culture of Career Management is a philosophy for ongoing development that affects every aspect of the workplace, from the talent hired to how they are developed and managed. **The single most important step in building that culture is developing a robust Career Conversation process.**

### A Culture Of Career Demands Active Participation From All Parties:

- 1. Individuals:** Using **SMART** Goals as a guide, Individuals must play an active role initiating and driving ongoing Career Conversations with their manager.
- 2. Managers:** The conduit between the organization and the employee, Managers are accountable for articulating organizational purpose and performance goals back to their team.
- 3. Organizations:** To ensure sustainable business performance, Organizations must commit to the Career Conversation process; embedding it into the culture and holding all parties accountable for participating.

Ultimately, organizations benefit when employees are equipped to take on new challenges and opportunities. **We know that optimizing human potential is the most critical determinant of future business success and growth.** In today's Human Age, the organization succeeds by helping the individual succeed. Is your organization committed to employee development?

## IS YOUR ORGANIZATION COMMITTED TO EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT?

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- Do the leaders in your organization actively support a “Culture of Career Management”? What examples can you point to that illustrate an organizational commitment to development?
- Do you have a robust Career Conversation process? What new practices do you need to develop?
- How have you prepared your employees to initiate the Career Conversation process with their managers?
- How have you prepared your leaders to facilitate ongoing Career Conversations with their employees?
- How do you hold leaders accountable for facilitating employee development?
- What resources and tools do you offer to support employee development? Does your organization need to expand these tools, and broaden access to them?
- What learning opportunities do you offer employees at all capability levels to accelerate their growth?
- Are there opportunities to expand the role of Human Resources and senior leaders in the Career Conversation process as a way to underscore the importance of long term career development inside your organization?

## About Right Management

**Right Management** is the global career and talent development expert within ManpowerGroup®. We help organizations become more agile, attractive and innovative by creating a culture of career management and learning that nurtures future talent, motivates and engages people, and provides individuals with opportunities to increase their value throughout their careers. We improve time to value through our expertise in organizational effectiveness, career management and individual development. Our approach is centered on the fact that organizations thrive when individuals are successful in their careers. We've spent the last 35+ years identifying workforce challenges and developing innovative solutions, enabling our globally informed methods to be time-tested across more than 50 countries.

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