

Redefining the career experience for today's workers



A range of economic and social forces are reshaping today's workplace, upending traditional notions of work and careers. While we know careers continue to matter to employees, what is less well understood is how employees are defining a career. This prompts us to ask, What does a career even mean in our reconfigured world of work?

The employee perspective gains new currency.

Employers continue to face a tight labor market. Half of employees globally indicate they are either actively looking for a new role or at risk of leaving their employers for the right offer. Moreover, we have the added pressure of inflation and threat of recession. So even if employers want to pay more to keep great talent, the economic pressures are limiting their ability to do so.

But it takes more than compensation to attract and keep great talent. Beyond pay and core benefits, WTW research shows that employees are looking for flexible work arrangements, work that gives them a sense of purpose and support for

their personal development.¹ And there is a retention angle: **Employers who fail to provide effective career management support risk losing employees to competitors.**²

It's been interesting to see a redefined notion of purpose emerge as a motivator for employees. During and coming out of the pandemic, employees have been questioning the meaning of work and assessing whether their work environment allows them to develop in a way that aligns with their redefined personal values. These employees are not necessarily thinking in terms of a traditional employer-defined, linear career path anymore. They are adding alignment with "personal values," "flexibility" and "support" as new qualities of a fulfilling career.

Combined, these factors create an opportunity for employers to rethink how they are defining and supporting the "careers" of their employees.

But the data suggest that employers aren't keeping up. The percentage of employees who agree that their organization provides people with the necessary information and resources to manage their careers effectively has dropped from 78% in the first quarter of 2022 to 67% in the third quarter, below pre-pandemic levels.

¹WTW 2022 Global Benefits Attitude Survey

²WTW Normative Database of Employee Opinion

So what does career mean to your employees?

Career development can't always involve vertical advancement, especially given today's flatter organizational structures.³ Additionally, we know expectations around work arrangements (e.g., flexibility, support) and fit (e.g., alignment of purpose and values) are influencing whether and how an employee decides to build a career with the company. To support and keep pace with employees' career aspirations, organizations are stepping back to rethink the traditional notion of a career. And here's how they're doing it:



Listen, listen, listen

Savvy employers don't make assumptions about employee sentiment or motivators. They are tapping into how their employees are reassessing the purpose of work, what energizes them and how work aligns with their changing needs. With the focus on **quiet quitting**, listening to what your employees are saying — and not saying — is absolutely critical.

Listening programs — including employee engagement surveys, pulse checks and virtual focus groups — help employers understand what matters to employees in their career experience. To capture changing employee sentiment, employers may also consider implementing the type of ongoing listening programs that engagement platforms such as WTW's Engage offer.



Think beyond generational stages

Approaching the career experience primarily through a generational lens can result in a distorted picture of development needs. For example, not all employees born in the period from 1981 to 1995 — categorized as Gen Y — or those who have been in the workplace for 10 to 15 years will want the same things. Some may be juggling work and a young family, with vertical career progression a long way down the list; some may be focused on upward career progression along a managerial or technical path, while others may be opting to do something different — for instance, taking on a challenging assignment to build new skills and bolster their resume.

To understand this at a deeper level than just generational assumptions, first segment your



workforce using your employee listening data to develop personas to better understand the values, needs and career ambitions of different groups within your diverse workforce. Personas are an averaged and statistically differentiated model of certain general characteristic parameters derived from observed patterns of behaviors. WTW's segmentation and persona methodology helps uncover what really matters across your various employee segments instead of relying on generalization, which can be influenced by bias.



Focus on experiences and skills

Many of today's employees are more interested in learning about the experiences and skills they can acquire within a certain period of time than understanding an organization's career hierarchy and making a lifetime commitment to a profession or industry. After all, as employees undertake more project-based and gig work, their collection of work experiences and skills will be what readies them for new opportunities and unlocks their career potential. Employers that deliver meaningful career experiences in the moment are meeting employees where they are.

To provide employees with new experiences and opportunities to learn new skills, it's important to identify the transversal and emerging skills critical to your business strategy. WTW's **market scraping** methodology uses artificial intelligence to identify the skills that matter to the success of both your organization and your employees. Then you can integrate the identified skills into your learning ecosystem.

³E. Vaara et al, "How to Successfully Scale a Flat Organization", Harvard Business Review, June 2021

How can employers deliver the career experience?

Once employers understand what a career means to employees in the current work environment and have a defined career philosophy for the organization, they can take measures to deliver a meaningful career experience.



Build a flexible infrastructure

This involves developing an overarching career framework starting with a job architecture that serves as an organizing construct aligning jobs based on the types of work performed. Some organizations may need to update their job architecture to better support their current employees. Our research shows that fewer than half of employers (44%) indicate that their job architecture supports a flexible and agile workforce.⁴ Additionally, a knowledge architecture identifies the skills required to accomplish the work in different jobs. Flexible career pathways — vertical and horizontal — are then mapped to reveal potential career journeys.

Our breakthrough research reveals that those organizations that thrive in the age of disruption and return superior financial performance are those that are significantly better at identifying, attracting and securing the talent they need and supporting them to achieve their ambitions.

⁴WTW Reimagining Work and Rewards Survey



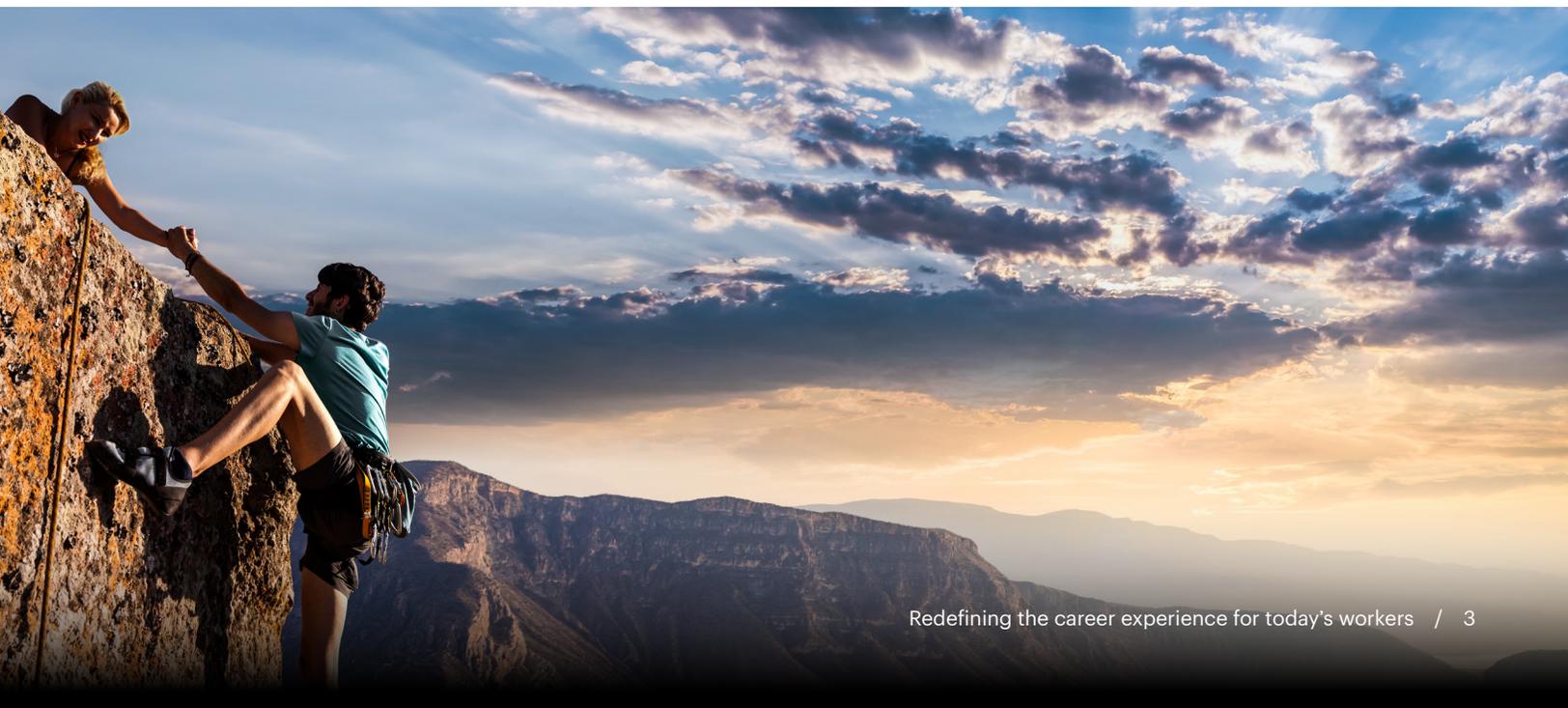
Provide the technology and supporting resources

Personalized communications regarding learning and development opportunities can help empower employees to chart their own career journeys. Employee experience platforms such as WTW's Embark for Career powered by Career Navigator help to communicate career paths and opportunities on an individual level, and then link to downstream systems providing access to learning management resources. It's essential to ensure that career communications are transparent and accessible at any time, from anywhere, on any device.



Foster a culture of growth and accountability

In addition to infrastructure and technology, the right culture for learning is needed to bring the career experience to life. Easier said than done. This requires an organizational culture with a growth mindset as well as leaders and managers who are accountable for continuous talent building, motivated to deliver on the full career experience, and recognized and rewarded for doing so. Successful organizations achieve this through careful evolution of their culture using change management techniques that involve, enable and excite employees to drive them to own their own careers. They understand and demonstrate the mindset, behaviors and enablers that, together, create a meaningful and intentional career experience for their employees.



Where to begin? Start by asking the right questions.

Designing and delivering a career experience requires more than a “once and done” effort. Employers use continuous listening activities to monitor employees’ changing career expectations and needs and to deliver an experience consistent with how their employees now define “career.”

Before addressing tactical issues related to delivering a career experience, take the time to explore basic questions:

- What is a career? What is the career philosophy for the organization?
- What are today’s employees looking to get out of a career?
- What are the career experiences that will enable your employees to thrive in the workplace and contribute to the success of your organization?

Keeping up with changing answers to these questions will provide you with a foundation for continuously redefining and enhancing your employees’ career experience in a way that delivers value to employees and the organization.

About WTW

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