

# EVOLVING CAREER CONVERSATIONS

BY LEONIE STANFIELD

When someone mentions career conversations what is the first thing that comes to mind?

Is it the formal review type conversations? Is it conversations around making a transition between roles, industries or life stages? Or the informal mentor, colleague, friend, partner conversations?

We keep hearing that the world of work is changing – 44 percent of Australian jobs at risk of digital disruption in the next 20 years and 17 jobs and five careers over a lifetime.

Is this complex world of work also changing how we think about career conversations? And is it changing what a career conversation is? For instance, do you associate career conversations with employee induction programs? When you design and develop an induction program do you intentionally create the conditions for effective career conversations?

Aberdeen recently reported that 83 percent of organisations find that continued engagement after acquisition is a top pressure and 55 percent of best in class organisations realise they often fail to continue engagement through onboarding and into the employee lifecycle.

Organisations are concerned (or should be) about how they manage their talent. Gallup's annual global

engagement survey indicates only 13 percent of employees are fully engaged in their work. Career conversations are important given that one in five people are in the wrong role, jobs they are not motivated by, engaged with or productive in.

## Career conversation challenges

Time and resources are constant challenges and even when induction is recognised as a strategic investment, embracing a career conversation focus may be a step too far. Practical considerations around the who, what, when and where of career conversations is often front of mind given that existing staff may not be skilled, equipped and motivated to effectively engage in these conversations.

There can even be a concern that these conversations could lead to lower retention rates as new staff more clearly see the degree of alignment between their career needs and aspirations and the organisation's offering.

## Career conversation value

The approach an organisation takes to facilitating career conversations reflects their focus.

Where the focus is solely on the organisation's needs the conversations (within induction and ongoing) are likely to be the standard expected ones. Expected conversations that tick the boxes play it safe. Having the types of conversations that managers and new employees expect keeps everyone comfortable, providing the safety of some certainty and consistency with past or anticipated experience. Productivity and performance then tend to be duty driven. Differences in the experiences and attitudes to work across generations can mean that the expectations of seasoned managers and new graduates might not necessarily align.

As organisations focus on the individual's needs they facilitate encouraging conversations that see and support potential. These conversations

promote professional development and personal growth, expressing an interest in the individual working towards achieving their potential. This reflects the value placed on learning and development by the organisation and it is likely that productivity and performance will continue to develop over time.

Exploring conversations that seek possibilities take a solutions oriented approach to utilising talent – one where desired outcomes for both the individual and the organisation are met. This creates the conditions where productivity and performance will be delivered.

Evolving conversations that prioritise partnership demonstrate a strategic focus that moves beyond the win/win to co-designed work. These conversations communicate a genuine intention to work together within the context of agreed vision, values and outcomes by creating a space where organisations and individuals can share their knowledge, experience, expertise and values as equals. Evolving conversations generate ongoing insights, stretching and shifting thinking, beliefs and behaviour and can empower both individual and organisational change. This is the rare environment where productivity and performance excel.

What types of career conversations are most common in your organisation at induction and beyond?

## Career conversation content

Encouraging, exploring and evolving conversations necessarily address various elements of career design and choosing where to place the attention and emphasis depends on the intent of the conversation.

Gaining clarity around our strengths, skills and career story (internal motivations and values) is a natural first step. Clearly seeing and understanding ourselves, our abilities, personality, preferences, desires and needs, creates a strong foundation for building our career futures. And these futures take shape as we confidently value our strengths, assess our skills,

## Performance Generating Conversations



## Career Design Matrix



own our stories, and commit to living these out. Encouraging and exploring conversations play an essential part however it is in the evolving conversations that our careers are shaped around the expression of our truth, who we want to be in our work and through our work. Commitment to our own values and mission means living out who we are meant to be and making the decisions that reflect our best selves.

The reality is that our careers are an ongoing journey of discovery and application of what we know, believe and are willing to do in order to create the life we want. Complexity, change and chance all play a key role, as do our past

experience, present wants and needs, and future desires. Susan Scott in *Fierce Conversations* says “companies, teams, families and communities have been changed by individuals who have arrived at compelling clarity about the trajectories of their corporate and individual lives,”

Does your induction process prioritise a program of information over conversations that develop shared perspectives?

Is it time for a conversational shift? What will be the gains in productivity and performance when your organisation embraces encouraging, exploring and evolving career conversations?

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