

HR.com's Future of Career Development and Mobility 2025-26

Drive employee growth and build organizational capability

State of the Industry Research



Career development maturity remains low

96%

of organizations fail to reach the "Innovative" stage of career development program maturity.

- 4% **Innovative:** Integrated, reinforced, forward-looking, agile, linked with workforce planning, and constantly trying to improve
- 13% **Strategic:** A formal approach is culturally reinforced, linked to specific goals, and integrated with succession and talent management
- 20% **Defined:** There's a defined and standardized approach linked to performance reviews but it's not prioritized
- 34% **Advancing:** Managers provide some support but lack structure
- 30% **Beginning:** Programs are either ad-hoc or nonexistent



How to evolve from stagnant to strategic

Many organizations lack strong career development systems:

First, strengthen foundational processes

Only

39%

say their career development processes are effective

25%

personalize career planning to each employee

18%

have a formal internal mobility process

Moreover,

41%

identify and address employee skills gaps to a low or very low degree

Compared to career development laggards, those with more mature functions (leaders) are:

- ▶ **7X** more likely to identify and address employee skills gaps to a high degree (49% vs. 7%)
- ▶ **4X** more likely to have a formal internal mobility process (42% vs. 11%)
- ▶ **3X** more likely to personalize development to each employee (53% vs. 15%)

Career development leaders: those who responded Strategic, or Innovative to the question, "How would you describe career development in your organization?"

Career development laggards: those who responded Beginning or Advancing to the same question.



Second, remove barriers to internal mobility

Although 55% prioritize internal candidates for open roles, major obstacles persist:

lack of career paths for non-managerial roles

45%

insufficient available positions/hiring freezes

41%

employees not provided with dedicated development time

35%



Most organizations rely on foundational processes, but mature organizations use more robust methods.

The **most common** development-friendly processes used are:

- ▶ Goal and performance review loops (57%)
- ▶ Mentorship and coaching (44%)
- ▶ Individual Development Plans (33%)

Compared to laggards, career development leaders are significantly more likely to use:

- ▶ Mentorship and coaching (77% vs. 34%)
- ▶ Continuous learning culture (53% vs. 36%)
- ▶ Action plans (48% vs. 10%)
- ▶ Succession management (47% vs. 20%)

Third, invest in development-driven initiatives

40% of organizations do not offer career development programs to all employees.

Fourth, ensure equitable access to development opportunities

Programs primarily target:



leadership (executives and managers) (50%)



professional/technical roles (47%)

Groups least targeted:

- ▶ early career employees (33%)
- ▶ frontline/operational roles (32%)
- ▶ underrepresented groups (5%)

Only half of HR professionals indicate that managers are encouraged to help employees develop their careers.

Fifth, increase manager accountability

Only 16%

of organizations require managers to actively help employees develop.

Only 11%

of organizations reward managers for developing their direct reports.



Finally, incorporate AI and technology to scale development

53% do not use AI in any listed career development applications.

Career development leaders are much more likely to embrace AI for strategic purposes compared to laggards:

identifying skills and career potential (23% vs. 5%)



identifying and closing skills gaps (23% vs. 6%)



providing training on how to use AI (17% vs. 6%)



providing personalized career recommendations (17% vs. 2%)



Final Key Takeaway:

The state of career development is stagnant, posing a major risk to talent retention and workforce agility. Organizations can unlock workforce potential by shifting to structured, personalized, manager-supported, and technology-enabled development practices.

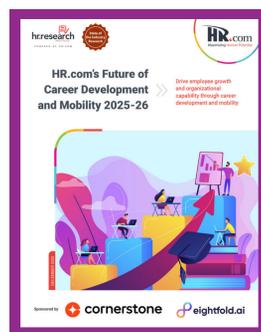
About the Survey:

The HR Research Institute fielded the "Future of Career Development and Mobility 2025" survey between September and November 2025. We gathered responses from 210 HR professionals. Respondents are from all over the world with the majority from the United States. Participants span diverse industries, with 74% coming from mid-sized or large organizations.

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