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How is Frequent Movement in the Early Part of Employees' Careers Related to Longer-Term Success in Leadership Roles?

Abstract

While this question could not be directly answered, it can be connected with the need for leaders to have a variety of experiences. Some experiences can be planned and others happen naturally as leaders are prepared, developed, and preserved throughout their career journeys.

The median number of years that workers have been with their current employer is 4.6. This suggests employees change not only jobs but employers fairly frequently. Much of this happens earlier in an employee's career journey, and ideally would lead that employee to increased responsibility and influence in an organization. We'll look at three categories of job movements to help identify the purpose and benefits of early job changes.

Keywords

leadership management, early career, movement in early career, millennials, generation Y, HR, human resources

Comments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INITIAL QUESTION

How is frequent movement in the early part of employees' careers related to longer-term success in leadership roles?

INTRODUCTION

While this question could not be directly answered, it can be connected with the need for leaders to have a variety of experiences. Some experiences can be planned and others happen naturally as leaders are prepared, developed, and preserved throughout their career journeys.¹

The median number of years that workers have been with their current employer is 4.6.² This suggests employees change not only jobs but employers fairly frequently. Much of this happens earlier in an employee's career journey, and ideally would lead that employee to increased responsibility and influence in an organization.³ We'll look at three categories of job movements to help identify the purpose and benefits of early job changes.

TYPES OF MOVEMENT

External Movement ("Job Hopping")

Roughly 70% of bachelor's degree graduates and half of MBA graduates change companies within the first five years of employment.⁴ Some of this change is explained by labor market conditions, but much of the motivation to change comes from pursuit of a higher salary or a more engaging work experience. Either way, a high performing "job hopper" can prove valuable as they can adapt quickly and often have determination to succeed in challenging environments.⁵ Recognizing this segment of external talent is crucial as the expectations and trends continue to show an increase in job hopping.

Internal promotions and lateral movements

Nonlinear job routes are becoming more common as organizations become leaner and flatter.⁶ These types of lateral job movements promote skill development and help employees take on new challenges.⁷ These kinds of opportunities are great for employees who have demonstrated that they excel in their area, are highly committed to their work, have been helpful to others on their team, and are overall showing a sense of ownership.⁸

Rotational Programs

Many companies find success in formal rotational programs where associates purposefully spend shorter amounts of time in various roles or departments. The goals⁹ of these programs are to:

- Assess new employees' interests and skills to determine their final placement
- Allow deep immersion into the organizational business and culture
- Acclimate employees to foreign environments
- Groom future managers and executives

This can be a very effective way to immerse employees in the company culture and get them familiar with the company's products and/or services.⁹ These programs are typically geared more toward entry level employees, but this concept can be recreated for employees further in their career as well. Rotating in other jobs can help avoid burnout and allow employees to gain more general skills that can help them be more effective managers.¹⁰ Job rotations also produce skilled, competent staff possessing complete understanding of the business process as well as a network of colleagues to promote future success.¹¹

NAVIGATING FREQUENT MOVEMENTS FOR SUCCESS

Because frequent job movements are not only typical and expected, but helpful and encouraged, employees and managers alike need guidance on navigating these changes. The focus should be on tactics that allow for upward mobility. While there are as many as 15 upward mobility tactics, consider these four tactic categories that give guidance for navigating toward future success:⁶

- Creating a foundation,
- Building a self-brand,
- Becoming centered, and
- Seizing opportunity (see appendix).

As you focus on these tactics, frequent movements (no matter the type) will align an employee's progression with the company's need for leaders.

For individual employees, consider these points:¹²

- 1) Know what you're getting out of every job change, not just changing for a change
- 2) Be sure your change is defensible and rational
- 3) Stay in each job long enough to accomplish something and learn something
- 4) Your most recent job reflects who you are – be sure it reflects your career aspirations
- 5) See the longer term effect on career map rather than merely a short term cash increase.

For managers wanting to help develop internal talent, consider the following:

- 1) Develop a coaching relationship with your employees through frequent conversations¹³
- 2) Allow employees to take on difficult assignments to demonstrate and build credibility⁶
- 3) Don't be afraid of losing your talent as it will remain in the organization
- 4) Partner with HR Managers to identify other training activities.

CONCLUSION

As you consider the impact of frequent movement in your organization, first identify the main types of movements employees are making, why they are making them, and what the outcomes are. This will allow you to make connections from the effects of frequent movement to outcomes of leadership success. Then, as you embrace the reality of frequent movements in today's workforce, create a plan for employees and for the organization to manage job changes to make the best use of your organization's talent.

Frequent job movement may not necessarily be a replacement for other key potential indicators, but it can help your organization identify talent who are more prone to flexibility, strategic insight, emotional stability, and adaptability. Using these inputs, you can analyze key experiences needed in each division or function that prepare leaders for top levels of the organization. The most important factor to consider with respect to frequent job movement is intent – that each movement is purposeful and impactful on the employee's development.¹

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APPENDIX: Mobility Tactics and Strategies⁶

Figure 1: Total sample percentage of subjects mentioning tactic categories

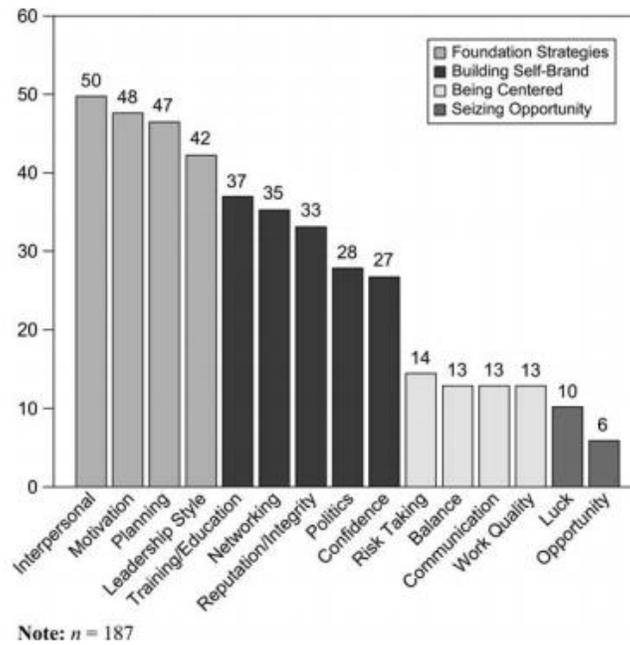
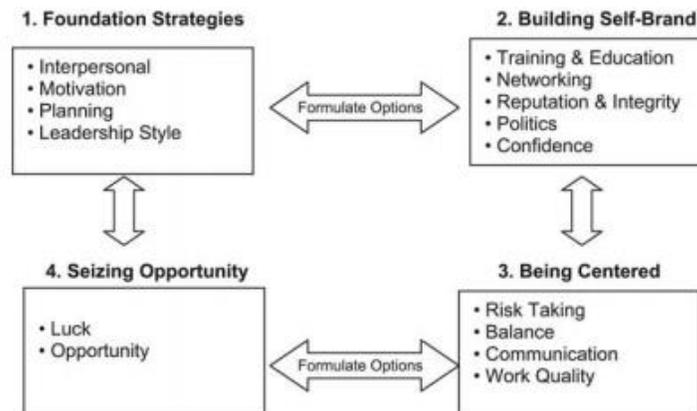


Figure 2: Framework of groupings of the 15 upward mobility tactics



Source: Laud, R. L., & Johnson, M. (2012). Upward mobility, A typology of tactics and strategies for career advancement. *Career Development International*, 17(3), 231-254.