Professional-Development Programs

Offering professional-development programs is one of the nine cornerstone policies that companies can implement today to help untapped talent enter, thrive, and stay in the workforce. To access the rest of the policies, read the full System Upgrade report today.

WHAT ARE PROFESSIONAL-DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS?

Professional-development programs, including career accelerators and rotation opportunities, help employees expand their networks and grow. But there's a lack of alignment between what employers think they're offering and what employees feel like they're getting. In a survey, 65% of executives believed their employees are "very satisfied" with development programs offered—but **only 32% of employees** said they are. A majority of employees believe professional-development programs are valuable, but a little over half of executives say these programs feel like a "waste of time".[1] There's a clear gap between what companies are offering and what employees need—and bridging it is good for your business and your workforce.

DID YOU KNOW?

01 Better performance

Companies that invest in human capital, such as professional-development programs, are more **consistent and resilient performers**.[2]

02 Improved retention

Professional-development programs **improve retention**—employees value career development and are willing to look elsewhere if their current company fails to provide it.[3]

03 Clear career pathways

Development programs help employees **chart clear pathways** for career advancement, **expand** their networks, and **grow** technical and professional skills.[4]

04 Promotion opportunities

Professional-development programs help Black, Latina, and Native American (BLNA) women **increase visibility and advance** in their company, so they have a greater likelihood of promotion opportunities.[5]

05 Employee satisfaction

Professional-development programs **raise employee satisfaction** with their employer, leading to greater loyalty, productivity, and engagement with the company.[6]

84%	58%	49%
Of employees expect their employer to provide learning and development programs.[7]	Of employees would leave their company if they didn't have access to professional-development programs.[8]	Of BLNA women said offering professional-development programs is impactful in joining, staying at, or advancing in their companies.[9]

1. CNBC (2023).
2. The Business Case for Investing in BLNA Women.
3. CNBC (2023).
4. System Upgrade: Rebooting Corporate Policies for Impact, p. 41 (2023) and Forbes (2023).
5. System Upgrade: Rebooting Corporate Policies for Impact, p. 41 (2023).
6. Forbes (2023).
7. CNBC (2023).
8. Forbes (2023).
9. System Upgrade: Rebooting Corporate Policies for Impact, p. 42 (2023).

POLICY IN PRACTICE

Meet Alex, an entry-level engineer, who has been on your team for two years. At the start of the year, Alex wanted to move from being responsible for their own deliverables (which they're already good at) to being a people manager responsible for the work product of a full team. But Alex didn't know what tools were available or what their role progression might look like.

Luckily, Alex reached out to their manager who pointed them to career development resources and tools she used to advance her own career. Six months later, Alex is promoted to associate lead and consistently produces wins for their team. Thanks to company tools and resources, Alex was ready to take their career to the next level and become someone teammates could admire as someone who steps up to tackle a challenge.

POLICY PAIRINGS

If you're looking to supercharge your professional-development strategy, consider also implementing the recommended cornerstones:

- Provide actionable next steps for development
- Share salary ranges
- Create a central and accessible internal jobs board

6 DESIGN QUESTIONS

It's not just about offering professional-development programs—it's about intentional design. Organizations can ensure their policies and practices are accessible and effective—and thereby efficient—by asking six key design questions:

1	**How can we use quantitative and qualitative data to identify how pain points differ for each group?**	Organize listening sessions, focus groups, and surveys that collect disaggregated data from employees by race, gender, and level to identify unique pain points around professional-development.
2	**How can we offer employees multiple relevant options?**	Provide a range of professional-development program options (e.g. job shadowing, coaching, internal workshops, goal setting opportunities, internal networking events, tuition reimbursement, reskilling/upskilling, external cohort programs or workshops like LinkedIn learning).
3	**Have we ensured that all options are accessible and easy to use?**	Provide multiple platform options for programs (e.g. in-person, online, asynchronous and synchronous) and give employees access to a personal professional-development tracker.
4	**How are we communicating frequently and clearly about this practice?**	Consistently communicate across multiple channels about professional-development programs whenever there are new opportunities to increase visibility (e.g. through newsletters, employee resource groups, offline bulletins, firmwide town halls, annual review meetings).
5	**How are we promoting a culture that encourages adoption?**	Encourage people managers to normalize conversations about professional-development and share their own experiences of skill growth.
6	**How are we continuously measuring impact and iterating as needed?**	Using feedback forms after firm-wide trainings, ask employees across different segments of the workforce what is useful about professional-development programs or what continued pain points they are experiencing and use the data to update programming.

Questions?

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