

A man with a beard and a woman with curly hair are looking at a tablet together in an office setting. The man is leaning over the woman, who is holding the tablet. They both appear to be engaged and smiling.

# From Career Pathways to Career Flows

Why skills led career pathways are becoming the foundation of internal mobility

# Executive Summary

Organisations across industries are facing a growing challenge: retaining talent while building the capabilities needed for an increasingly complex future of work.

Although leaders recognise the importance of internal mobility and career development, many still rely on rigid role frameworks and outdated structures that restrict movement and slow capability growth.

The consequences are predictable: employees struggle to see a future within the organisation, critical skills remain scarce, and turnover continues to rise.

In the UK, the **average employee turnover rate sits at around 35%**, with significant variation across sectors. Meanwhile, **34% of UK workers** say they are considering leaving their job in 2026, signalling a continued rise in mobility expectations.

Research consistently shows that much of this

turnover is avoidable. According to the Work Institute, **63% of employee departures** are driven by preventable factors, particularly the lack of career growth and progression opportunities.

Forward thinking organisations are responding by redesigning career development around skills, mobility and opportunity rather than static roles. This shift enables people to move across functions, develop future capabilities and build meaningful careers inside their organisations.

Traditional career frameworks are failing, and internal mobility has become a critical retention strategy. Organisations are now placing more emphasis on building more dynamic career pathways that support both business performance and employee expectations.



# The Retention Challenge: Why Talent Is Leaving

Employee expectations around career development have changed dramatically. Careers are no longer viewed as linear progressions within a single function. Instead, employees expect opportunities to learn, move and grow across roles and disciplines. However, many organisations have struggled to keep pace.

This trend is particularly strong among Gen Z and Millennials, who prioritise skill development and advancement opportunities over traditional benefits. The implication is clear: career development is no longer optional - it is central to retention.

## The Cost of Early Attrition

One of the most damaging aspects of turnover is how early it occurs.

A significant proportion of employee turnover happens within the first year, often before organisations have realised the full return on their recruitment and onboarding investment.

Replacing an employee is expensive. In the UK, research from Oxford Economics shows that the **average cost of replacing an employee exceeds £30,000**, once lost productivity and onboarding time are factored in.

Recent research highlights the scale of the challenge:

**34% of UK workers** are considering leaving their job in 2026.



**63% of employee exits are preventable** driven by issues such as career stagnation, work life balance and management challenges.

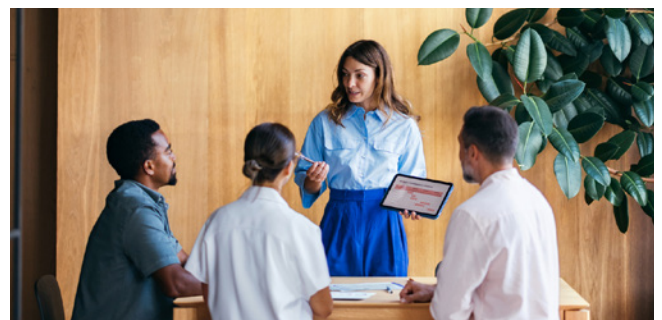


**Career development** remains one of the most frequently cited reasons for leaving across global surveys.

Beyond financial impact, high turnover disrupts:

- Team productivity
- Organisational knowledge retention
- Employee engagement
- Leadership capacity

In many cases, employees leave not because they dislike the organisation, but because they cannot see how to grow within it.





# The Internal Mobility Advantage

While many organisations struggle with retention, others are seeing measurable benefits from investing in internal mobility.

LinkedIn data shows that employees who make an internal move within three years have a **62% chance of staying**, compared with **38% for those who do not**.

Organisations that prioritise career development also report:

- Stronger employee engagement
- Faster capability development
- Improved workforce agility
- Longer employee tenure

Internal mobility is therefore more than a retention tactic - it is a strategic capability that enables organisations to deploy talent more effectively and reduce reliance on external hiring.

# Why Traditional Career Frameworks Fall Short

Many organisations have career frameworks or job architectures in place, but these often fail to translate into meaningful movement. Common issues include:

## 1. Careers Built Around Roles, Not Skills

Traditional frameworks define progression vertically through senior roles. This limits mobility across functions and makes it difficult for employees to explore new opportunities.

## 2. Progression Paths are too Narrow

When roles above an employee are filled, progression becomes blocked, creating the perception that advancement requires leaving the organisation.

## 3. Career Information is not visible

Employees often lack visibility of potential career paths, required skills or alternative opportunities.

## 4. Managers Lack the Capacity to Support Development

Many managers lack the time or tools to support development effectively, creating a gap between organisational intent and employee experience.

## 5. Career Frameworks Delivered in Static Formats

Often career pathways are mapped out within documents that quickly go out of date, are hard to access and therefore lack engaging appeal.

# The Shift to Skills Led Career Pathways

Leading organisations are redefining career development around skills and talent flow rather than static job structures. In this model, careers resemble a lattice rather than a ladder, enabling employees to move across functions, projects and roles while building new capabilities.

This approach emphasises:

- Skills as the foundation of growth
- Visible and flexible progression routes
- Cross functional mobility
- Faster capability development



# Career Development as a Retention Strategy

Retention concerns continue to rise, and learning opportunities remain one of the most widely used strategies to address them. But learning alone is not enough.

Employees want to see how development translates into real career opportunities. When learning is connected to visible pathways and internal mobility, the impact is significantly greater.

Recognition also plays a role. According to Achievers, **57% of employees say feeling recognised makes them less likely to take a call from a headhunter**, reinforcing the link between development, engagement and retention.



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# Enabling the Next Generation of Career Pathways

Designing modern career pathways requires both a shift in mindset and the right tools. Organisations need solutions that can:

- Map skills across roles and functions
- Visualise potential career movements
- Support development conversations
- Connect learning to real opportunities
- Enable 'real-time' accessibility

When implemented effectively, skills led pathways can:

- Improve retention
- Unlock internal mobility
- Accelerate capability development
- Increase fairness and transparency
- Support organisational agility

## The Future of Careers Inside Organisations

Careers are becoming more dynamic, personalised and skill driven. Organisations need workforces that can adapt quickly to changing demands, and employees want meaningful, flexible growth.

Skills led career pathways offer a practical way to bridge this gap — enabling visible progression, cross functional mobility and continuous skill development.

### Sources

UK turnover rate (35%): UK Money; CIPD

Intention to leave (34% in 2026): Stribe

Preventable turnover (63%): Work Institute Retention Report

Cost of turnover (£30,000+): Oxford Economics

Internal mobility retention (62% vs 38%): LinkedIn / SHRM

Recognition impact (57%): Achievers Workforce Institute

### Continue the conversation

Join our webinar on Thursday 19th May to explore how skills-led pathways create clear progression, enable cross-functional moves, accelerate future skills and boost fairness and retention, and how employees in organisations with strong internal mobility stay 60% longer.

**Thursday 19th May 2026 | 12.00 – 1.00pm**


Scan the QR code to register today.



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