

# CAREER DEVELOPMENTS

## Career Development in Business & Industry

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Rethinking the Role of Career  
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# Rethinking the Role of Career Professionals in Business & Industry

BY PAULETTE FRIED

A landmark study of more than 40,000 organizations published by Bersin & Associates (2010), *High Impact Learning Cultures: 40 Practices for an Empowered Enterprise*, concluded that “the single biggest driver of business impact is the strength of an organization’s learning culture.” These research findings have been used globally as keystones by human resources leaders and solution providers, but little has been written about their relevance to career development professionals. This article identifies the corporate practices that are strengthened by internal career development professionals and the implications for establishing corporate career services.

During the six year, data-driven study, Bersin & Associates interviewed and surveyed organizations to better understand how a number of pre-identified best-practices influenced their performance. After careful correlational analysis, they found 40 practices that rose to the top across all industries and company sizes ([http://marketing.bersin.com/rs/bersin/images/Forty\\_Best\\_Practices.pdf](http://marketing.bersin.com/rs/bersin/images/Forty_Best_Practices.pdf)).

As ‘culture’ is defined as a set of behaviors and processes that impact an organization’s success, it is incumbent upon leaders at all levels of an organization to question what they do and how they work, in an effort to transform the corporate culture. This rethinking of an organization’s assumptions is part of a learning process that was coined “double loop learning” (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

Of the 40 key practices identified, Bersin estimated that eight are owned by top leadership, 25 are owned by line management and only seven can be owned by human resources or learning and development staff. Instead, it is proposed, and outlined on page 17, that 14 (or 1/3) of the practices are buoyed by career professionals serving as internal consultants to employees (be they individual contributors or managers). These 14 practices, further expanded with annotation from the author of this article, fall into all six core themes to which Bersin assigns the full 40 practices.

## CHALLENGE

The challenge seems clear. The career development community ought to encourage and help business thought leaders and human capital strategists apply double-loop learning to rethink their assumptions about corporate career services. Devaluing, overlooking or eliminating career services programs should be reconsidered. Trained, skilled, internally-based career professionals are uniquely capable of promoting a mature and viable learning culture.

Consequences of NOT including Career Development Consultants:

- Losing talented staff who disengage, under-achieve or retire-in-place.
- Having employees who are moved or steered in the wrong direction, or choose to leave.
- Hampering the emergence of a learning culture.

## BENEFITS

Companies that embed career development consultants reap the benefits of an affordable, efficient and effective way to enhance the learning culture, while bolstering recruitment and retention.

- In-house knowledge of enterprise-wide learning and development resources and career industry best-practices.

**Double-loop learning** is the modification or rejection of a goal in the light of experience. This type of learning recognizes that the way a problem is defined and solved can be a source of the problem itself.

# 14 practices buoyed by career professionals serving as internal consultants to employees fall into all six core themes.

## EMPOWERS EMPLOYEES

### Practice #2:

#### Asking questions is encouraged.

*Author Annotation:* To that end, career consultants can help employees hone and phrase their questions so they will be well received and not off-putting or difficult to answer.

## PROVIDES ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

### Practice #4:

#### Employees are frequently given tasks or projects beyond their current knowledge or skill level in order to stretch them developmentally.

*Author Annotation:* Career development consultants can work with employees to discover what those might be, where to find them or how to create them.

### Practice #24:

#### Most employees have career development plans.

*Author Annotation:* Consultants are available to coach employees on devising and shaping their plans.

### Practice #31:

#### The learning and development department regularly re-evaluates its learning offerings and spending decisions and reallocates resources accordingly.

*Author Annotation:* Career development consultants are able to provide input to learning and development leaders, based on their own insights and feedback gleaned from employees.

The ability to customize career services that focus employees' attention and intention, and mitigate information overload or professional stagnation. A resource solely-dedicated to engaging the development needs of career self-reliant employees.

Advances the on-boarding and assimilation of new hires, understanding of interpersonal dynamics and organizational change, as well as alignment of employee and corporate goals. Optimizes getting the right people in the right job at the right time.

## DEMONSTRATES VALUE

### Practice #6:

#### The organization values and rewards employees who learn new knowledge and skills.

*Author Annotation:* Having career professionals available as internal consultants for employees is a demonstration of this corporate value.

### Practice #8:

#### The organization believes that learning new knowledge and skills is a valuable use of time.

*Author Annotation:* Career development consultants serve as a 'hub' for accessing tools, resources and information for gaining personal and professional knowledge and skills (e.g., through education, training, stretch assignments, mentoring, rotation programs, self-assessments, and extra-curricular activities).

### Practice #9:

#### Employees perceive that learning and/or developmental opportunities are of high value.

*Author Annotation:* A corporate career development program conveys that and career professionals reinforce it.

### Practice #10:

#### Employees take active responsibility for their own personal development.

*Author Annotation:* Utilizing career services and working with a career consultant is initiated by the employee. Many of us see this as falling under the core theme above, Empowers Employees.

### Practice #30:

#### Employees know what learning and/or developmental opportunities are available to them and where to find them.

*Author Annotation:* Consultants are a resource for directing staff to internal and external, traditional and non-traditional, formal and informal opportunities.

In addition, leaders have a partner that supports, not supplants, their role as coach.

## CONCLUSION

Internally-based career development professionals provide indisputable value to companies committed to creating an empowered learning culture through the best practices identified by Bersin & Associates. Labeling ourselves as 'career coaches' or 'career consultants' may not represent the breadth of our contributions to corporate leadership, perhaps we should rebrand ourselves as 'corporate learning ambassadors!'

## ENCOURAGES REFLECTION

### Practice #7:

#### The organization values mistakes and failures as learning opportunities and provides structured opportunities for reflection.

*Author Annotation:* Meeting with a career development consultant provides a structured opportunity for reflection in a safe environment and facilitates employees' reframing of those experiences to yield new insights.

### Practice #29:

#### The organization encourages taking time to analyze and reflect.

*Author Annotation:* Meeting with a career specialist provides and encourages that time.

## ENABLES KNOWLEDGE SHARING

### Practice #14:

#### Stories about the organization's history are frequently shared at company events and in company materials.

*Author Annotation:* Career development consultants know and share this information, giving context to current circumstances, as well as corporate policies, strategies and decisions.

### Practice #35:

#### The organization regularly surveys employee opinions; feedback is freely communicated and quickly acted upon.

*Author Annotation:* Career development services users are encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions, as well as provide feedback through program surveys. Composite program data can be used to report common issues, trends and themes that surface for corporate climate sensing.

## BUILDS TRUST

### Practice #22:

#### Employees generally feel safe in the work environment.

*Author Annotation:* Having access to a career development consultant can be a safe-haven for employees to speak freely and openly about concerns and ideas.



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A complete list of references is available upon request from the author.