

# Creating career development models and practices for an ICT company

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<b>Degree programme</b> International Business Management	
<b>Thesis title</b> Creating career development models and practices for an ICT company	<b>Number of pages and appendix pages</b> 42+3
<p>The need for this research emerged when commissioning company which operates in the ICT industry decided that they want to improve their career development process. The purpose of this study is to help the company to execute talent development coherently. The research focuses on finding out employees' career expectations and providing models and practices that help the company to create clearer career development process.</p> <p>The literature review discusses the topic of talent management and career development and how they can benefit both employees and organizations and what should be considered when creating career development process. To achieve best possible results in career development, the organization's interests must meet the employee's career expectations. Organizations who invest in talent development ensure their employees knowhow and, thus, build competitive advantage. This can also help the company to build employer brand which helps to retain the existing talent and attract new talent.</p> <p>The research is conducted as a qualitative case study research utilizing abductive approach. The data is first collected by an online questionnaire to form an understanding of the individual career expectations. The online questionnaire is followed by semi structured interviews that deepen the understanding on the individual needs and reveal problematics in the current career development practices.</p> <p>The findings reveal that employees value career development efforts and find them motivating. Despite the fact that company is already providing career development opportunities, there is a lack of systematic management of the development process which slows down the maximal learning and self-development. In order to implement effective career development efforts, the needs of an individual and interests of the organization need to be convergent. Manager's role is important in making this happen as manager can guide the employee to the right direction and take employee's hopes and wishes into account. The development process of an individual does not only depend on learning new skills, but to try and develop them while performing concrete tasks. On-the-job learning can be increased and harnessing the existing knowledge and skills to coach others can bring meaningfulness to both parties.</p> <p>The research provides guidelines for creating career development process in the commissioning company but the research cannot be generalized but does not reach for it either.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> talent management, talent development, talent retention, career development, career paths, career anchors	

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# 1 Introduction

Career development, being part of a talent management, is a topic of a growing interest. Organizations are paying more and more attention to career development because it enables improvement of the level of talent retention (Deloitte, 2012, 6) and helps the organization to build competitive workforce (Gómez-Mejía, Balkin & Cardy 2016, 219). Competition of talented employees is growing especially in ICT industry and besides attracting the talent, developing and retaining the talent have become more important.

Today's workforce differs from its predecessors in many ways. Where as our grandparents used to spend their entire career within the same company and sometimes in the same position as well, people's job tenure within the same employer is much shorter nowadays unless there is a career progress within the same company. The millennials, young adults born in the early 1980's to late 1990's, have different expectations of working life and this sets pressure to the employers as well. According to Deloitte survey (2018, 2), the millennials expect their employers to be more responsive to employee needs. Career development opportunities can be considered as one area of those needs.

The researcher was offered an opportunity to explore career development and conduct a research that focuses on improving employees' career development management within a company that operates in ICT industry, more specifically in the field of digital technology. Due to confidentiality issues, the company will be referred to as company X. The aim of the research is to develop career development models and practices that support the wishes and needs of the employees. The company X has already provided certain development opportunities but clear structures have been missing. The company X employs 90 people and is headquartered in Helsinki, having a side office in Tampere as well. The company has both Finnish and foreign employees and it is also to be studied how cultural differences effect on forming career development practices.

The special focus of this research and development plan is to find out how important the employees consider career development planning and find out what kind of interests and hopes they have for their careers. It is important to hear employees' wishes in order to build relevant models and practices that support individual career growth. This thesis consists of two parts, first of a case study research which identifies the problematics and then of a detailed action plan which consists of policies and practices that should be implemented within the organization.

This study is needed because company X is lacking a clear and structured model of career development for their employees and the company wants to improve this area. As the company operates in industry where competition of talented employees is high it is important that once they manage to acquire and train the talented work force, they manage to keep them for future deploy. It has happened that employees have left after certain years in company X's service and according to the company's HR department, one reason has been the need to proceed in one's career and employees have not found these opportunities with their current employer.

In order to retain the talented employees and to get the most out of the talented workers, structured policies and practices are needed in career development. Company X's HR says that opportunities exist, but employees are not always aware of them. The initial aim is to explore employees' career development expectations and then provide company X with suggestions on how they could respond to the expectations in a more structured manner.

This research will bring value to the company because the company is lacking information of the employee's preferences on career development. This study aims to achieve knowledge about the career development opportunity preferences, identify employees' needs and desires of career development and then provide the company with a detailed action plan of procedures and practices that should be implemented. The action plan will provide company X with tools to develop consistent career development activities by combining the organization's future talent needs with employees' individual career goals.

The following chapters will cover the theoretical framework considering talent management and career development, research problem, research methodology and methods, analysis and conclusions. The emphasis in the theory part is to present theories, previous studies and models that are relevant to this research and that can be useful in solving the research problem. In research methodology and methods part, it will be justified why certain approaches were used and why they were the most suitable ones for this study. In the analysis part the research results are presented and discussed.

## 2 Research problem and questions

As explained in the introduction, competition of talented employees exists in the ICT industry. Offering career development opportunities is one way of engaging employees as well as building competitive workforce. The problem the company X wants to solve is that there are not clear structures for career development although they have implemented career development efforts such as trainings. This research was conducted to answer the problem and create clear models and practices for career development.

Topic of career development could be approached from different angles. Therefore, it is important to narrow down the research questions so that they will bring exact needed information. The questions were defined together with the company HR to ensure that the collected data will be valuable and usable.

The main research question of the study is:

- What kind of practices are needed to improve career development management within company X?

The sub-questions of the study are:

- How important do employees see career development opportunities?
- What kind of career expectations do employees have?
- What actions could improve individual career development in company X?

In order to find out the best practices and structures for career development planning, it needs to be identified what kind of expectations and desires the employees have. Sub-questions are contributing to the solution of the main research problem clearly because they provide background information of the current situation and help to identify the improvement areas. Employees of the company X are in key position to provide answers to what kind of career development opportunities they wish to have and how much it matters that they exist. After discovering the expectations, it is time to discuss what policies and practices should be implemented in order for the employees to build their career in company X instead of changing the company.

### **3 Talent management**

Talent management is an obvious theoretical framework to be studied for this research as it includes the concept of career development. Talent management, career development, career paths and career anchors are the most relevant concepts for this study and they justify why it is important for company X to put emphasis on career development efforts and also provide insight into building suitable models and practices around it.

#### **3.1 The concept of talent management**

According to the research by Tansley & al. (2007, 7-8), the definition of talent can vary depending on what the organization in question considers as a talent but common finding was that talent refers to individuals who can make difference to the organization's performance. Talent can be also defined as a sum of individual's abilities such as experience, intelligence or an attitude including the individual's ability to learn (Devine & Syrett 2014, 1). Defining talent is crucial to the effective and successful deployment of talent management (Tansley & al. 2007, 8). Pilbeam and Corbridge (2010, 102) specify that talent management means systematically attracting, identifying, developing, engaging and deploying individuals who have high potential which makes them of a particular value to an organization. Talent management strategy is a structured way of recruiting, retaining and developing individuals. The goal of the talent management strategy is to employ people who will deliver superior performance. (Davis et al. 2007, 1.)

Scullion and Collings (2011, 5-6) present key streams explaining what talent management is. First stream substitutes talent management for human resource management, limiting the focus to specific HR practices such as recruiting or succession planning. The second stream outlines the development of talent pools focusing on protruding employee needs and managing the advancement of employees through positions and lies upon manpower planning and succession planning. The third stream emphasizes managing of talented people. According to the third stream, all roles within the organization should be filled with top performers and it highlights management of poor performers. Fourth stream can be also identified and its focus is on identification of key positions which have impact on the overall competitive advantage of the firm. Researcher summarizes that what all these streams have in common is the acknowledgement of the importance and value of having talented workers and focus on getting the most out of them. Dessler (2011, 389) summarizes talent management well saying that from employer's point of view, talent management is a career management as employees want to align their skills and development so

that it ensures successful career and employer wants to integrate same functions to be able to utilize the corporate talent in best possible way.

Recruiting suitable and potential candidates is the first step of talent management processes but talent management does not stop there as continuous development of potential individuals can help the company to perform better. Company X is facing challenges in sufficient recruitment as well, as the competition in the digital industry is growing, but in this research, the focus is on studying talent development and career development and how these parts of talent management should be considered and how they can benefit the organization when paid attention to.

Tansley & al. (2007, 48) found out in their survey that rewards play an important role in people management strategies and unless there is a joined-up approach between rewards and talent management, the effort put in talent management activities may not bring wanted results nor improve talent retention. Opportunities to train and develop as well as constructive feedback are ways to reward an employee besides financial rewards and having functional rewarding system can be a competitive advantage as it can help retain employees (Koskinen, 2018).

According to Pilbeam and Corbridge (2010, 102) talent planning needs to be effective and corporate strategy has to be clearly articulated to pursue talent management strategy. It is necessary to identify what talent is appropriate for the business in question because it significantly influences the talent management approach which are exclusive, inclusive and hybrid models. Exclusive approach means that talent management focuses on top performers and key positions in the company for succession planning whereas inclusive approach acknowledges that employees on all levels have talent that is beneficial for the company. The chosen approach will determine the size of talent pool to be managed. (Pilbeam & Corbridge 2010, 102.)

Both approaches have their pros and cons. If company decides to deploy exclusive approach, one of the risks is that there is high potential for lack of engagement and increased turnover of those employees who do not belong to the designated talent pool. It may also lead to a situation where talent types are overlooked if focus is only on one occupational group. (Tansley & al. 2017, 21.) On the other hand, in exclusive approach the company is able to provide chosen talent pool more individualized programs and identifiable, strategic resource for succession planning for future leaders of the organization and it



is also easier to evaluate benefits the provided resources bring. Exclusive approach is often considered as a tool to develop future leaders, the top performers. (Tansley & al. 2007, 21.)

Tansley & al. (2007, 22) present that as exclusive approach focuses on developing the future leaders, inclusive approach enables all employees in the organization to develop themselves. As ideal as it sounds, inclusive approach can struggle with too thinly spread learning and development resources and increased competition but is able to increase employee engagement wider in the organization and support succession planning in all key roles instead of only the top key roles. It is important to acknowledge that in inclusive approach skills core to the business may not receive as much investment as needed whereas it encourages development of more diverse workforce. (Tansley & al. 2007, 22.)

According to the research by Tansley & al. (2007, 22) many companies utilize hybrid model because it brings together both aspects and serves the organization's needs more appropriately. Hybrid model can be seen as a compromise and practical choice because it focuses on developing future leaders of the organization which is very crucial but at the same time it is not neglecting other talent existing in the organization (Tansley & al. 2007, 22).

According to Tansley & al. (2007, 28), talent management and succession planning are sometimes mistaken one for another. On the researcher's opinion, succession planning and exclusive talent management approach seem very similar. Succession planning means the organization's activities of developing the existing talent for future deployment and it often focuses on the key positions in the leadership (Berger & Berger 2011, 120) whereas developing talent pool is an wider activity and can provide broader organizational resource (Tansley & al. 2007, 28). Pilbeam & Corbridge (2010, 103) explain that talent pool describes the company's resource for talented employees and based on performance appraisals, assessments or nominations an employee can become member of the talent pool. It needs to be considered that talent pools can change and assigning an employee to certain talent pool creates certain expectations that need to be met to avoid frustration. Therefore, the talent pools created should be in line with planned organizational growth and development. (Pilbeam & Corbridge 2010, 103.)

Succession plans have traditionally been the way to develop the leadership pipeline instead of considering employees on all levels and career development has also often been reserved for those with highest potential (Berger & Berger 2011, 161). According to Berger and Berger (2011, 161) traditional succession planning is not enough and individual

career growth paths are needed to enhance it so that career development can be offered to wider range of workers. Pilbeam and Corbridge (2010, 100) also share their concern on the sufficiency of succession planning as it can be inflexible and can fail to recognize the apparent changes within organizations. Employee must be able to build one's own career plan but the company and managers can support in following the career growth plan by focusing on "what's next" since the day of on-boarding (Berger & Berger 2011, 161).

Career planning is the individual's process in clarifying one's career goals and establishing strategies to achieve them (Berger & Berger 2011, 120). Model that fits succession planning can also guide career planning but the key difference is that who makes the decision. Launching both simultaneously can help individuals establish "what's in it for me" while organizations build bench strength in line with future talent needs. (Berger & Berger 2011, 122.) When launching succession planning and career planning, the first thing to be determined is that when these are appropriate strategies. Succession planning has been traditionally associated with structured career moves and thus might be suitable only to stable environment and clear career structures (Tansley & al. 2007, 29). It is important to remember that succession planning nor career planning is not a panacea and does not solve all talent issues (Berger & Berger 2012, 123). It is still important to focus on organizing work the best way possible, because succession planning and career planning are only components of comprehensive work and workforce planning. Crystallizing leadership thinking is one of the aims so that all stakeholders know why the company is undertaking the program. (Berger & Berger 2011, 123-124.) Berger & Berger (2011, 124) also point out that talent can be developed only when present job duties and worker competencies are clarified.

### **3.2 Career development**

Career can be defined as the "occupational positions a person has had over may years" (Dessler 2011, 373). According to Gómez-Mejía & al. (2016, 210) career development is not a singular training program or career planning workshop but an on-going structured effort recognizing people as organizational resource. Career management is the effort the organization makes in order to enable employees to further understand and develop their skills and interests of their career. Career management can consist of specific activities such as providing realistic career-oriented appraisals, posting open jobs and also offering formal career development activities. Career development itself refers to activities e.g. workshops that aim to contribute employee's career exploration, establishment and fulfillment. (Dessler 2011, 373.) Career development has changed over time due to changes in

business life. Nowadays career development more often seeks to meet both employers' and employees' needs as previously it fulfilled mainly the organizational needs (Gómez-Mejía & al. 2016, 210). The figure 1 illustrates the elements that successful career development considers.

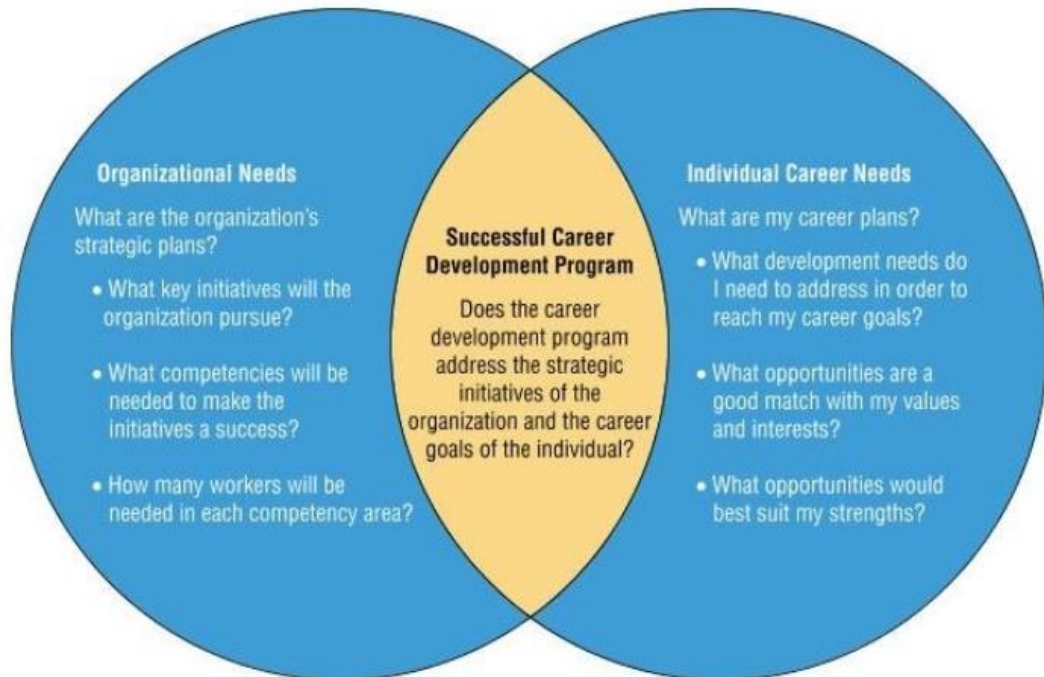


Figure 1. Successful career development programs address organizational and individual needs (Gómez-Mejía & al. 2016, 219).

Career development must be self-powered by the employee whose responsibility is to take care of personal development, but in order for the companies to remain competitive and keep on attracting top talent, the companies have to provide systems and structures that support career development (Berger & Berger 2011, 159-163). Gómez-Mejía & al (2016, 220) concur that more and more responsibility is shifted to the employee but employee-empowered career development still requires organizational guidance especially in flatter organizations where promotion opportunities are scarce. Career development and promotions are what most of the employees hope for and existence of these opportunities can increase the level of employee engagement (Dessler 2017, 379-382.) Dessler (2017, 376) presents an example of a company from Silicon Valley that has launched career development center in order to help the employees fulfil possible development gaps and to choose appropriate career opportunities within the company. The company itself believes that this program is an explanation to why their employees' average tenure is twice as much as other Silicon Valley organizations.

Elsdon (2010, 16) speaks about building workforce strength and addresses that career development practices provide a link between organizational needs and individual needs to create and sustain workforce strength. By workforce strength he means capability and flexibility – having the skills needed and staff to handle shifts in demand. Workforce strength matters because it benefits all stakeholders of the organization from better financial performance to employee’s work environment and potential for sharing the organization’s success. (Elsdon 2010, 4-7.)

It is up to the employee to seize the opportunities and establish goals but employer can support this in many ways from simple job postings to more comprehensive efforts such as lifelong learning budgets which provides employees with career-related education and development of their wishes (Dessler 2017, 376-377). Despite the fact whether or not the company has official career development policy, the manager’s role cannot be overestimated. Skillful supervisor can offer guidance and help the employee to stay on right career track. Manager can make sure that the employee gets a good start in the organization, schedule performance appraisals and focus on making sure the employee’s skills and performance are in line with the employee’s career goals. (Dessler 2017, 381-382.)

### **3.3 Career paths**

“A career path presents the steps in a possible career and a plausible timetable for accomplishing them” (Gómez-Mejía & al. 2016, 300). Vorhauser-Smith (2012) emphasizes the importance of career paths and demonstrates with an example that if career paths do not exist within organization, people will look for them elsewhere. An example is about a company’s store where many of the employees work besides studying. Once they graduate they apply elsewhere for the positions that meet their expertise better although those positions also exist in the current company. Visibility of career paths is important because if they are not seen, it equals to no career opportunities. (Vorhauser-Smith 2012.)

Career paths encompass different forms of career progression. It includes vertical career ladders, which means moving upwards, dual career ladders which means moving upwards without managerial or supervisory position and horizontal career ladders meaning moving laterally and gaining experience in different fields. (SHRM 2015, 1-8.) Career ladders are the advancement of jobs in organization within certain occupational field ranked from lowest to highest based on the level of responsibility and pay. (SHRM 2015, 1.) Several factors impact on the need for organization to create formal career paths and career ladders such as difficulties in recruitment or employee disengagement (SHRM 2015, 2).

According to National Association of Electrical Distributors (2013, 3) career path can be self-identified which is determined by the participant and it bases on the past success, personal interest and may zigzag through position. It gives a sense of autonomy and enables customizing the path but it may not prepare individual for the talent needs of the organization. Defined career path is created by the organization and often reflects the paths that have generated the most success in the past. Defined career path assures that future talent needs of the organization are met and measuring participants' progress is defined. It offers clear path for the participant to achieve one's career goals. (NAED 2013, 3.) Defining the career paths depends on the organization's culture, objectives and future direction and it can be a hybrid model (NAED 2013, 4.)

Career ladder is a traditional and hierarchical company defined career path. It has advantages as it is clearly defined and the progress on the ladder is measured. Still, this type of career path is not very flexible as it might not identify or develop employees with requisite skills that were not attained using the standard career ladder. Career lattice on the other hand offers more flexibility. Besides hierarchical upward moves it also includes lateral moves. Lateral moves are also needed in leadership paths because certain skills and experience from the front line cannot be attained by vertical moves only. (NAED 2013, 4.) Career lattice offers a way to broaden individual's experience and it is especially important in organizations with limited promotion opportunities (Devine & Syrett 2014, 103).

Society for Human Resource Management (2015, 3) state that creating career paths or ladders for employees does not only solve problems such as disengagement but helps organizations to differentiate from labor market competitors, retain key workers, keep younger workers and decrease turnover after economic downturn. This is possible because employees are often more engaged when they believe that their employer is concerned about their career growth and provides opportunities to achieve individual career goal at the same time fulfilling the company's mission (SHRM 2015, 1).

### **3.4 Career anchors**

The previous chapters explore organization's role in career development. Still, the career self-management should not be forgotten as the employee has the main responsibility of developing one's career and only the employee can determine what she or he wants from one's career (Schein 1985, 35). Edgar Schein (1985, 1) presents his theory of career anchors saying that career anchor is the person's self-image of where the person is good at

and what the person wants and values. There are always reasons for career choices and the career anchors can explain them because it is likely that the person tries to fulfil one's own self-image. Career anchor mirrors the patterns and factors the person is not willing to give up because they represent the person's real oneself and thus knowing one's career anchor can help more consistently when career choices are confronted.

Career anchors are something that develop with time. When people first enter the working life, they may have expectations, ambitions and fears but often comparably little information about themselves, especially concerning their capabilities and talents. Interests and values can be determined by testing and counselling but what they will be good at or how they will feel about certain type of work can't be determined beforehand. As an example, a graduate may target to manager position but might not enjoy working with people and clearly then there's a mismatch. Little by little, as people gain work experience, they learn about themselves and about their talents, motives and values. (Schein 1985, 35-36.) Schein (1985, 36) states that as people gain more insight they learn to make more rational career choices. The dominant elements that dictate the career choices can be considered as career anchors. The career anchor can be described as an area of self-concept which is so crucial that the person would not give it up even when obliged to make a difficult choice. Schein (1985, 37-45) presents eight themes that are often the ones that anchors tend to develop around to. In the following, the anchors are presented but it's important to remember, that one need does not erase another "but the career anchor is the overriding concern or need that operates as a genuine constraint on career decisions" (Schein 1985, 39).

There are people who prioritize safe and security in working life and prefer predictability and can relax because they have made it there and they have the feeling of belonging. Depending on life situation, security and stability can be a priority to many others but to some people they have become insuperable issue that guides all career decisions at all times. People as such, often seek job tenure and jobs in companies of strong financial situation and good reputation, e.g. of not ever laying people off. (Schein 1985, 37.) There are two types of people who are anchored around security and stability concerns. The first type of people become "organization men" who turn over the responsibility of their career management to the organization. The organization man is willing to change location and area within the organization whenever needed and thus taking part in the career game. The other type of people put down roots to certain geographical area and make investments in housing or way of living. This person is ready to change job or company as long as it is in the same geographical area. Common to these types is that they choose secu-

rity and stability instead of career advancement. When they reach the security and stability in working life, they are satisfied with the attained level. (Schein 1985, 37.) In the researcher's opinion, it is important that employers are aware of this as well because not all employees want to keep rising within the organization as people want different things from their careers.

There are people who have the need for autonomy and do not like to be restricted by fixed working hours, procedures, dress codes or other norms which are common in organizations. Despite the fact what the job is, they need to do it their own way and they prefer to take care of their careers on their own terms. The overriding need is to have flexibility and independence and these feelings can be associated with the feeling of being professional who can be trusted and who knows what she or he is doing. (Schein 1985, 38.) Managerial positions are not always the best ones to autonomy anchored employees because when person is responsible for other people, budgets or outcomes limit the level of freedom. On the other hand, managerial position can provide latitude in how to get work done and also possibility to make rules and norms according to one's preferences. Depending on the organization and the position, autonomy anchored person can work as a manager but if the person gets upset by bureaucracy or norms that exist the person might find more satisfaction in teaching, consulting or other positions as such that provide freedom. Autonomy anchored people may be irritated by the things that security anchored people find comforting, and vice versa, the freedom autonomy anchored person's needs can cause insecurity to security anchored people. (Schein 1985, 38.)

Need to develop new products or services or to create new business are appealing to some people. Entrepreneurial anchored person has the compulsive need to create something of one's own and prove to others that she or he has done it. It might be useless for the organization to retain this type of person unless the employee is given share of her or his inventions. Security and autonomy are things that entrepreneurial anchored person is willing to let go in order to establish her or his own business. (Schein 1985, 39).

Technically anchored people find sense of identity in the actual content of the work and their ambition is to become better and better in what they do. Sometimes, when these people proceed in their career, they might end up in areas where they are not as talented or skillful and can have the feeling of being "pulled back" to the area where they are more competent (Schein 1985, 40). Schein (1985, 40) argues that every profession has their craftsmen and gives an example of a doctor who wants to be the best neurosurgeon in the world. This can apply to all professions from specialists to managers. These people are bound by the need to exercise and display their skills and it overrules other concerns such

as security, autonomy or entrepreneurial activity (Schein 1985, 40). Considering career development of technically anchored people, they seek opportunities to grow and develop their skills and become true specialists instead of looking for promotions. They find the work as such meaningful and like it and want to keep learning. For organizations this sets challenges as they need to be able to offer learning and development opportunities if they wish to keep these people as technically anchored people will follow where the job challenge leads. (Schein 1985, 40.)

Schein (1985, 41) points out that technically anchored people are exposed to career mismanagement because there is a lack of dual ladders work in the companies. Promotions are the usual reward of high performance in technical or functional area and this often leads to position where managerial skills are needed. If technically anchored person finds out that there is a lack of these skills or she or he does not like the job, it becomes problematic how to take the steps back gracefully and return to the technical or functional area. These people might find out that they have the needed skills if they only manage within their area of expertise and might remain in these positions throughout their careers because they prefer the content of the work, not management per se. It is also important to acknowledge that skills that are useful today may be obsolete tomorrow and competition against more recently trained people is high and thus technically and functionally oriented people need to consider sustaining their interests in later career stages. (Schein 1985, 41.)

On the contrary to technically anchored people, to some people management per se is what interests them. Managerially anchored people want high levels of responsibility, opportunity to contribute to the organization's success and leadership opportunities. People may have wishes of working as a manager and suitable traits for it already in early stages of working life but it can be assessed only after gaining experience whether they have the talent and motivation to work as a manager. (Schein 1985, 42.) Managerial anchor is built from analytical competence, interpersonal and intergroup competence and emotional competence. Managers need to be capable of problem solving and decision making, managing groups, meetings and projects and bringing the right people together to the problem solving. Apart from this, they need to be emotionally competent because managers face tough situations such as layoffs. Combination of those three skills is needed in general manager's job and it can take time to learn to be a general manager because it is more difficult to find situations and assignments where these skills can be tested. (Schein 1985, 43-44.)



Some people choose their occupation according to a central value they want to carry out. Typical examples of these occupations can be a doctor, teacher, social worker or a priest, so called helping profession. When person is service anchored the career is organized around a job where certain values such as helping people can be met. However, people may choose profession of a doctor because they want to work on the technical skills and thus people may also enter the business life due to sense of service. It is possible that an engineer identifies with a product so that she or he continues the job only as far as she or he can work on that particular product or manager who works on her or his position because she or he wants to help the employees to succeed. The common thing is the dedication to a certain cause. Service anchored people may end up creating new organizations e.g. concerning environmental issues. (Schein 1985, 44.)

Challenge anchored people care about winning out over others or obstacles. For them, success is defined by solving unresolved problems, overcoming obstacles or winning against extremely tough opponents. Challenged anchored people keep looking for tougher and tougher challenges. Lack of challenges cause irritation and boredom to this people type as all the other things such as area of work or salary are subordinate to possibility to constantly test oneself. General manager's position can be a good career choice for this anchor type because the position offers variety and challenge constantly. (Schein 1985, 45.)

Nowadays people have to balance between professional and private life. For some people, it has become the most important factor guiding their career, that they can integrate family, career and self-development. Life style anchored people do not want to make the choice between these. It can mean decisions about willingness to move to another place, number of working hours, issues of maternity or paternity leaves and the declining degree of company loyalty. Life style anchored people concentrate on adopting new social norms about the importance of balance and integrating life so that career decisions do not dominate it. (Schein 1985, 45).

The researcher thinks that career anchors are to be acknowledged because they effect on the career development practices and opportunities that organizations offer. Besides different hopes and expectations, people are bound by the anchors, crucial self-concept which will guide and define their career choices. Technically oriented employees value expertise and competence and therefore continuous professional development through trainings and assignments might suit them best whereas life-style anchored employees would benefit more from coaching as it is compelling to this anchor to get the most of both work

and leisure (Elsdon, 2010, 83-85). This means that the organization needs varying development opportunities in order to respond different type of needs.

### **3.5 Benefits of career development**

Why should companies implement career development efforts? According to Salminen (2005, 85) it is everyone's benefit that employee is offered sensible work and flexible career development because individual's development and progress is the requirement for the organization's development and progress. Organization consists of individuals and thus individual's progress is also the organization's progress (Salminen 2005, 85). Gómez-Mejía & al. (2016, 291) agree that career development is the key factor in building competitive workforce and, thus, companies cannot afford neglecting it.

Career development should be important to companies because it is one of the factors affecting job satisfaction and commitment (Berger & Berger 2011, 162) and Society for Human Resource Management's study (2016, 17) support this argument as it was found out that 47% of the respondents considered career advancement opportunities important within their organization. At the same time, only 24% of the respondents were very satisfied with the current career advancement opportunities (Society for Human Resource Management 2016, 16-17). Deloitte survey (2012, 6) reports similar findings as lack of career progress was one of the top factors causing employees to look for a job elsewhere.

Like stated before, talent retention is one reason why employer should execute career development efforts. Dessler (2017, 379) claims that career development efforts should signal the employer's interest in its employees' career success and thus the employer deserves the employees' commitment. Research by Tansley & al. (2007, 37) addresses that well-designed talent development has positive impact on the organization's bottom line but because maximizing individual's potential is not still a norm in companies it can cause employees to seek opportunities elsewhere. Thus, the researcher concludes that career development aims to retain and further develop talent for both company's and employee's benefit.

Labor turnover can become a problem when replacing employees is expensive or suitable individuals are hard to find (Pilbeam & Corbridge 2010, 107). In order to lower the labor turnover, companies can implement retention strategy but first it is essential to understand retention issues and why people leave (Pilbeam & Corbridge 2010, 109). As already presented, lack of development opportunities is one of the factors causing labor turnover.

According to Hay's study (2002) 66 percent of workers, who were satisfied with their employer, felt so because of opportunities to develop new skills. Besides developing new skills, career development programs' key element is the opportunity for promotion because knowing that employee's achievements are recognized and that the person is considered a promotion has enormous impact on employee commitment (Davis & al. 2007, 17).

Employee engagement plays a role in this research as the career development models and practices could help the employees to grow and proceed within company X instead of looking for another employer. According to Emma Bridger (2015, 6), there is no single definition to what employee engagement is, but it consists of things such as involvement, commitment, discretionary effort, collaboration, motivation and performance. "Employee engagement is a process by which people become personally involved in the success of a business" (Bridger, 2016, 7). It has been mentioned before in this research, that lack of career development opportunities can cause decrease in level of employee engagement. Although employee engagement consists of many other things besides career development, it is one of the components and important one considering this research. Employee engagement matters because organization's performance depends on the people working in the organization. Multiple researches show that higher level of employee engagement contributes to higher level of performance. (Bridger 2015, 18-19.) Besides the level of performance, employee engagement affects on employee turnover (Bridger 2015, 33).

### **3.6 Conceptual framework of this research**

Talent management and career development as concepts are quite large and considering this particular research, some parts are more essential than others. In the figure 2 the researcher visualizes the conceptual framework that is relevant to this research and this case company.

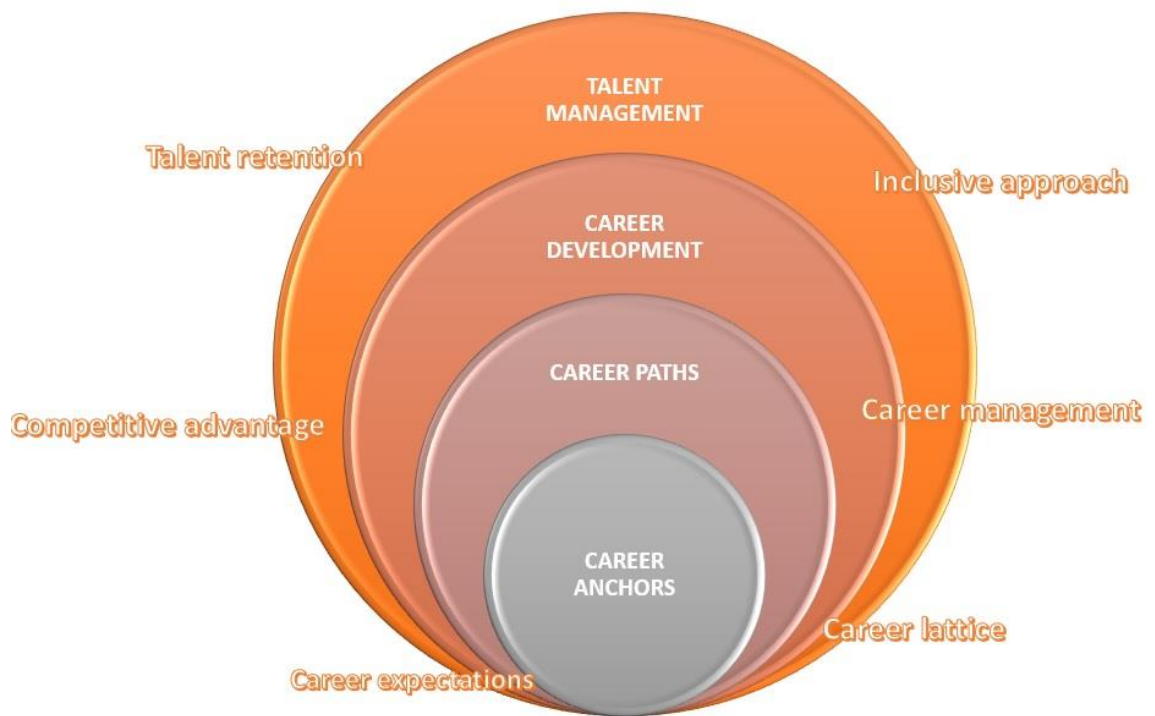


Figure 2. Illustration of conceptual framework

Structured approach to talent management has both pros and cons which need to be considered. Formalized approach may help the organization to attract new talent and show clear and staged learning strategy which is linked to relevant development process to both the employees in the talent pool and their managers. It also makes it easier to track the individual development and progress. On the other hand, formalized approach can be inflexible and become problematic if the talent pool is diverse when the development needs and paths differ. It can be concluded that structured talent development approach provides clear strategies, policies and practices but at the same time it can set limitations to developing talent. (Tansley & al. 2007, 40.)

The researcher thinks that structured talent management approach will provide greater benefit for the company X at this stage. At the moment, there are individual training budgets and possibility to choose different trainings which solve the issue of individual development needs but the talent management process itself needs to be more formalized and guided. One of the challenges that organizations are struggling with is to create an environment where talent management is clearly linked to organization's business strategy (Tansley & al. 2007, 37). Formalized talent development process is easier to link with organization's strategy and it also adds transparency.

When the research started, the company wanted to include everyone within the organization although the retention and development issues concern more the employees in software development and design. Due to this, it is clear that company X will embrace inclusive talent management approach in which all the members are included to talent development activities. There are different talent pools within the organization as there are clear distinction between roles and due to this, it is important to acknowledge the different talent pools and different needs in those.

As discussed, efforts in career development have clear links to talent retention. Building sustainable policies and practices for career development help company X to increase the level of retention which is important because the competition of talented workers is high in the digital industry. Employer who puts effort into its employees' development can be also seen appealing which helps recruit people. Career development can be seen as competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining employees at the job markets but it is also a competitive advantage as itself. Technology changes fast today and unless the company X trains its workers continuously it can start losing to its competitors. Besides learning new skills and technologies, it is important to improve and maintain the skills that already exist among the employees so that the company can answer to the needs of customers and offer needed solutions. Company is only as skillful as its employees and thus career development brings competitive advantage.

Career management is in the very heart of this research. Career management means the effort company X wants to put into developing its employees. It means systematic and structured plans, offering individual guidance, trainings and learning opportunities. Managers are in key role in planning the career path and helping the employee to walk along the chosen career path making sure the employee understands what is needed and required for each step on the way. Execution of career management would be difficult without career paths. Company X has a pay grade model which is built according to knowledge and skills starting from trainee position and ending up to lead position. Lead position in company X does not necessarily include managerial responsibility of people, it can be just responsibility of certain project or technology used. Vertical career ladders are traditional and clear but excludes possibilities for lateral moves. Career lattice provides career progress without managerial responsibility and is especially useful in flat or small organizations. In company X the promotion opportunities are limited and thus utilizing job rotation when employees can learn new things and progress in their career could be suitable. Although career lattice would already exist, it needs to be visible so that employees know what kind of different tasks and jobs they could consider and ask for. Career lattice also

serves those who are not looking for managerial position but want to expand their own knowhow and keep growing in their own field of expertise.

When planning individual career development paths, career anchors come into the picture as they guide the individual's career choices. Career anchors cannot be influenced by the organization but company X should be aware of them and they can be considered when discussing with employees about their career expectations and hopes. Career anchors will guide the choice of career path as well because paths that lead e.g. to managerial positions might not be suitable for all employees. Sometimes, employees might not know what certain positions require and by discussing career anchors taking the wrong path can be avoided. Acknowledging the influence of career anchors and talking about them can also help the company to guide employees in direction that suits both individual and organizational needs.

## 4 Empirical research

When the topic of the research was given to the researcher by the commissioning company, it was obvious that the research would be qualitative. It was decided that the research would start by online questionnaire and if needed, completed with interviews. The company HR took part in designing the research by providing information on the units of the organization and commenting questions they especially want to be answered.

### 4.1 Research philosophy and methodology

Research philosophy in this study is critical realism. Critical realism is a philosophy that “focuses on explaining what we see and experience, in terms of underlying structures of reality that shape the observable event” (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 138). Critical realism argues that understanding the world consists of two steps that are what we people experience and sense and that there is mental processing following the experienced and sensed “when we ‘reason backwards’ from our experiences to the underlying reality that might have caused them”. Critical realism is an obvious research philosophy for the researcher and this research because the study in fact does focus on explaining the phenomenon that is occurring in company X and the researcher believes that the ontology consists of the empirical, the actual and the real layers. (Saunders & al. 2016, 139.) Critical realists embrace epistemological relativism that states that knowledge is a product of time and social constructions are agreed on by people. In critical realism the researcher acknowledges the bias by world views and tries to minimize both bias and errors. Also, the role of the researcher is as objective as possible. (Saunders & al. 2016, 140.)

Researcher chose to use case study as a research strategy because it allows the researcher to study individuals, groups or phenomena in real-life context (Baxter & Jack 2008). Even though the aim of this research is to develop models for career development the primary target is to explore the employees’ expectations and the researcher is convinced that qualitative case study research is the most suitable strategy. Case study research is suitable when the focus is on answering “why” or “how” questions and as the chapter two of this thesis shows in this study there are “why” and “how” questions to be answered (Baxter & Jack 2008).

There are three types of case study researches called exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Noor, 2008). This research subscribes to explanatory case study research because

it focuses on studying what is the starting point for the development project and explanatory case study attempts to explain the phenomena in the data and can be useful in studying different processes (Zainal, 2007). Researcher chose to use single case study approach because it is more manageable and suits the objectives of this research. Single case study often suits studies that represents critical case or that are unique but it can also provide an opportunity to observe a phenomenon that has not been considered before (Saunders & al. 2016, 186-187).

In research design it is important to decide on approach to theory development. When using case study as a research strategy it is important the researcher is very familiar with the theoretical framework of the topic. In this sense it would be reasonable to use deductive approach where the theory comes first but the researcher argues that it does not fully serve the objectives of this study. Another option, inductive approach starts from collecting data and then moves to building theory but that does not seem fully suitable either. Abduction is an approach that combines inductive and deductive approach so that it moves back and forth from data to theory and therefore is more flexible for the researcher. In this case it means that the research starts with obtaining data explaining the existing views on career development in company X and then continues by integrating those views to conceptual framework which leads to building theory and then to detailed action plan. (Saunders & al. 2016, 145-149.) The researcher moved back and forth between the empirical research and theory during the research.

As mentioned before, this is a qualitative case study so the data collecting method was qualitative. Qualitative data is non-numeric and it can be interviews, audio recordings, videos, documents or other similar material (Saunders & al. 2016, 163). Qualitative research fits to the study's research philosophy, strategy and approach. In this study data was collected in various ways and therefore it is called multi-method qualitative study. (Saunders & al. 2016, 168.) The data collecting of this research consists of two phases, online questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research was the only realistic option for this research because employee expectations and needs are difficult to find out other ways.

## **4.2 Implementation and data analysis of online questionnaire**

The data was collected first through online questionnaire in order to reach as many respondents as possible. The online questionnaire was anonymous but included some statistical background information on the respondent's role within the organization. The



online questionnaire was logical option because of the organization's digital industry it is natural for the employees to answer online surveys.

The researcher constructed an online questionnaire including open-end questions (see appendix 1) that the employees of company X could fill in. The questionnaire was conducted in Webropol due to free access. Before distributing the questionnaire link, the questions were tested by two members in the company to ensure understandability of the questions. Small adjustments were made to the language. The company X has regular Monday morning get-togethers and the research was presented there by the company HR and after that the link to questionnaire was distributed by email to all employees. Company HR sent several reminders to the employees in order to increase the respondent percentage. The researcher did not take part into distributing the questionnaire link or encouraging the employees to respond to the survey.

For background information, the respondents were asked to clarify their role within the organization, their time span in company X's service as well as the total number of years spent in working life. 23 employees responded to the survey. Majority of the respondents' role was in the core business of the company X, 9 people working as designers and 8 working as developers. Altogether 6 respondents were working in the administration or in project management. 15 out of 23 respondents have worked in company X less than 3 years but company X was first employer only for 3 respondents. Almost half of the respondents have been in working life more than 7 years.

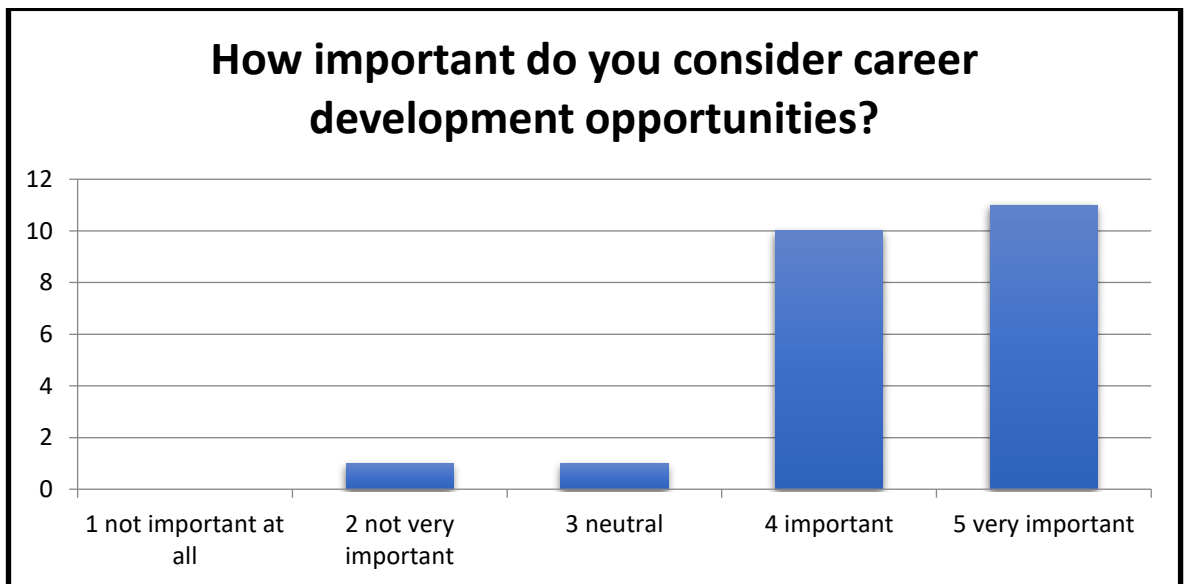


Figure 3. Importance of career development opportunities.

The respondents were asked how important they considered career development opportunities and how satisfied they were with the opportunities existing in company X. As figure 3 shows career development expectations are considered important in company X, average score being 4,3 out of 5. Company X conducted employee satisfaction survey during the spring 2018 and there “opportunities for career advancement” was ranked 11<sup>th</sup> out of 30 most meaningful factors. Both findings support the presumption pointed out in the theory part of this research that career development opportunities are important to employees.



Figure 4. Satisfaction with the career development opportunities within company X

Figure 4 reveals that employees are quite satisfied with the existing opportunities in company X but there is room for improvement. Respondents were asked to grade their satisfaction from scale 1 to 5 (1 very unsatisfied, 2 unsatisfied, 3 neutral, 4 satisfied, 5 very satisfied) and the average grade among the respondents was 3,7. Nearly 14% of the respondents considered the current career development opportunities to be good at the moment but there were almost 21% who were not satisfied with the situation.

The respondents were asked about their personal career development expectations. It seems that developing current skills as well as learning new skills are the most usual things the respondents are looking for as these came up in 15 answers. 87% of the respondents, who brought this up, belong to designers and developers. Respondents who said that they want to develop their skills also explained why. Respondents think that by developing knowledge and learning new skills they become experts in their fields and better in their jobs. It was also brought up that learning new things requires getting more challenging tasks. Three of the respondents pointed out that they also want to learn new

things outside their own specific area because they would want to expand their tasks from one specific area to new areas e.g. from visual designing to user experience designing or to learn about management besides the technical competence.

It was said that developing and fostering the know-how allows respondents to take on more responsibility and get more challenging tasks. 26% of the respondents said that they were expecting more responsibility at work. Getting more responsibility was connected with increased independence to conduct projects and freedom to choose tasks. Working as a supervisor was also mentioned together with getting more responsibility. There were also contradictory comments about promotions as not everybody sees becoming a supervisor the way to proceed with one's career but lateral moves that allow learning new and developing skills were mentioned.

In the results, the respondents made it obvious that they want to grow as professionals, deepen their know-how and thus take on more responsibility. Most of the answers were focused on the technical know-how naturally due to the company X's core business. Besides these, other non-technical expectations appeared as well. Coaching or mentoring others arose twice and also leadership and team development were mentioned. One of the respondents wished to have an opportunity to be an influential part of projects and company decisions whereas another respondent was eager to make sense by further developing company X as a social workspace.

Respondents were asked to tell about things that matter to them considering their careers in future. Answers to this question were very much aligned with the future expectations. Self-development opportunities are clearly the most important factor for the respondents as it appeared 15 times. According to the answers, self-development within one's competence area is seen important because it enables more responsibility and more variety in tasks which respondents are looking for in the future. Multiple respondents said that taking part into genuinely interesting and challenging projects is very important as well as being able to utilize the employee's full potential. Considering responsibility, it emerged that respondents also want to be more influential within the organization and be taken more seriously and trusted about what they do.

Promotion opportunities and being paid accordingly were found several times in the data. Few respondents pointed out that being paid accordingly is very important but it was clarified in one of the answers that when competitive salary alongside with know-how and responsibility are in line with interesting tasks it will carry the employee quite far. Several employees were interested in promotion opportunities but a worry of not having them

arose on both sides among administration and designing. The respondents said that due to organization's structure and their role, the promotion opportunities are very scarce or even non-existent and the researcher concludes from their answers that promotions are possible if someone leaves and that position needs to be filled. Besides promotions, being a coach or mentor arose in couple of answers.

Other things that people in company X truly value considering their career in future were enjoying the job itself, good atmosphere, job security, work-life balance and flexibility. Many of the respondents said that the most important thing was that they were happy with what they were doing. Researcher thinks that enjoying one's work is a combination of several things and career development opportunities is one of them.

Respondents were asked in which position they wish to see themselves within the next three years. By asking this question, the researcher wanted to find out employees' promotion and career advancement wishes in more detail. Traditionally, people are asked where they see themselves in five years. For this questionnaire, three years time span was chosen because in the digital industry company X is representing, things might change remarkably during longer time period.

Seven respondents said directly that they were looking for a promotion to either senior role of their current field of expertise or to the leading position, being responsible for major projects and working as a supervisor or being part of the management team. Clearly, traditional promotion opportunities still are seen interesting but there were several respondents saying that they wished to have the same title but more experience, knowledge and responsibility and one person brought up doing master's degree studies. One respondent said that she/he did not want to work as a manager or in management because she/he wanted to keep coding. Only one person brought up having a better pay in three years.

Respondents also brought up detailed wishes about what their position within three years would include. One of the designers wished to have more influence on the sales of design cases and one developer wished to get a role in consulting or strategic development of the competence area. Two respondents wanted to help others succeed in their tasks and one person was hoping to be more in contact with C-level executives because talking with these people would bring new insight and spark ideas. Respondents' wishes were to expand their responsibilities from their core expertise e.g. to more strategic level and being able to influence on things more.

Aim of this research is to provide company X clearer models and practices for individual career development and support the employees better in this. Thus, it was important to ask what kind of support the employees needed and wanted from the organization.

12 respondents mentioned trainings and saw them valuable and beneficial. Few respondents said that training opportunities already existed very well in company X and that there was a budget for those but there were also opposite opinions saying there should be more trainings or opportunity to participate in them. Alongside the trainings, competence development and conferences, it emerged that employees also needed tasks to utilize and test the learning they gained through these development activities. One respondent said that although there were learning and training opportunities, there was a lack of systematic way of agreeing on the learning processes and genuinely tying those to concrete tasks. Follow up on the trainings and conferences were missed.

Another topic that came up in 10 answers was guidance and support from the superior. Employees wished to have more time to talk with their superiors about their tasks, interests and developing opportunities. Two employees said that the discussions with management board members were very useful because they had the best knowledge of the future offering and this way employees might find opportunities they could not think of on their own. Some would need guidance from their superior in finding proper and relevant trainings for themselves. In the researcher's opinion, it became obvious in the answers that employees wanted to plan their career development together with their superior and create clear targets for the development and have someone to observe the process.

Training opportunities and planning the self-development processes together with the superior were dominant themes in the findings. Other things that arose were mentoring, time allocated to learn new things, more responsibility and more challenging tasks which would enable developing further and possibility to learn outside own competence area e.g. by joining different projects and switching roles. All the respondents had very clear thoughts about what kind of development opportunities they wished to get and how the company could help them obtain them. Clearly, different learning possibilities are already available but it seems, that at the moment it is more of the employee's responsibility to plan one's learning process.

Among the online survey respondents, clear differences between groups were not found. Despite the role, nationality or years spent in the organization, the same themes kept repeating throughout the answers. It is nearly impossible to withdraw conclusions between groups but it can be said that administration team members were slightly more concerned

about their career progress opportunities especially when thinking about promotions. Researcher is familiar with the organization's structure and concludes that the concerns are real because the size of the company determines the size of administration and unless the company grows, responsibilities or needs within administration may not grow. On the other hand, the same concern about lack of promotions was brought up in the designers' group as well because there is limited amount of design lead positions. All in all, based on the online survey, the action points the researcher will propose to company X will serve all employees.

### **4.3 Implementation and analysis of the interviews**

After analyzing the questionnaire results, the researcher wanted to deepen her understanding and chose to interview employees so the questionnaire was followed by semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because it allows the researcher to ask the interviewees to build up on their answers and explain them (Saunders & al. 2016, 394). The researcher built a list of themes with key questions that would guide the interview. The results of the online questionnaire played a key role in choosing the themes as well as theory on career development. Researcher was prepared that the course of discussion could be different from the chosen themes. Some themes might not be touched at all and some new themes might emerge during the interview. The key questions were formed to guide the discussion and bring it back to the topic if needed (appendix 2).

Interviewees were chosen with the help of company HR. The idea was to interview employees from the group of designers and developers, both Finns and foreigners. The chosen interviewees were not solely chosen because of their role or nationality but it was considered that the interviewees should be interested in the topic of career development and willing to participate in the interview instead of company HR assigning them to participate. The researcher was given list of employees who she could contact and invite to the interview and chose to interview four employees, two designers and two developers. The researcher wanted to include both employees who are quite new in the company and also those who have been there for several years. Researcher decided to do this in order to study if time spent in company X would impact on the results. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed for further analysis. The interviews also provided more insight to the international aspect of this research as the online questionnaire was responded mainly by Finnish employees. The following table provides information on the interviewees and when the interviews took place.

Informant	Position	Date
A	Designer	28.8.2018
B	Developer	30.8.2018
C	Designer	31.8.2018
D	Developer	31.8.2018

Table 1. Information on the interviewees.

The researcher wanted to dig deeper into employees' career development expectations. The answers were quite similar to the ones in online interview but more detailed. The expectations vary from being a coach to managing specific competences which are not yet as familiar but needed on the job. In the online survey, several respondents said that they need more challenging tasks to learn new things. Informants A and C of the felt that they have had enough challenge and as projects vary a lot, there are always new challenges to meet and overcome and it also enables learning. Informant D on the other hand felt that one's own career progress is very important and in order to develop further, informant D would like to take part into bigger projects which are more challenging and maybe one day lead a big project as well. Informant B brought up that as the company has certain technology stack, it has an impact on personal development. It is good for people who are happy just to do the job without thinking too much but can become limiting to those who want to expand themselves more.

Another topic that kept emerging in the online survey results was getting more responsibility and having the freedom to choose their tasks. Getting more responsibility did not appear in the interviews and when asked, people felt that they have enough responsibility for the moment. Thoughts about having influence on choosing the tasks were more controversial. Informants A and C felt that they can have an impact on their tasks because there are often so many projects to choose from and superiors listen to employees' wishes and pay attention to those whenever possible. The opposite opinion is not due to company's reluctance to consider employees' preferences but due to the state of customer needs. If there are only couple of projects considering certain competence area, there is not much to choose from. But still, the superiors have asked employees' opinion on undertaking certain projects if they seemed bizarre to ensure that it was not too painful for the employees to do.

When making career choices, there are several factors that influence the decisions. For the interviewees work-life balance was the most important factor according to the frequency followed by good working atmosphere, salary and self-development opportunities.

Informant C listed salary as a top priority but if offered a position with higher salary but less free time the person would really have to consider what to do. Having enough free time and not having to think about the work after leaving the office seemed important to interviewees. One of the interviewees is considering educating herself more and thus flexibility in working hours are important. Having a good team spirit was also mentioned because it has an impact on the work itself.

Within three years all of the interviewees would wish to see themselves in the same industry but doing more challenging tasks, except for informant B who felt happy with the way things are now and did not have any special plans. Interviewees did not mention promotions and informants C and D specifically wished not to work in managerial position but there were wishes for career progress in terms of becoming better in what they do at the moment and utilizing their knowledge in other type of tasks such a coaching like informant A wishes to. One of the employees had a dream of working and living abroad one day but it might be beyond three years.

There are competence lead positions in company X and these could be suitable positions for employees who want responsibility but not to manage people. According to one interviewee taking a lead position in certain competence is not simple because it's difficult to get the corporate approval for it and to get others follow you and come to you for help. Besides the lead position, one still has to work on the basic tasks and if the person is not being paid to rule people with an iron wrist, it is hard to evoke the change. Getting the corporate approval is difficult because it is not clear enough to whom to talk to about wanting to take lead position or who could put emphasis on certain competences.

The researcher found out from the results of online questionnaire that company X had training budgets for their employees and wanted to find out how the employees used it and what were the concrete benefits. All of the interviewees had utilized the training budget, mostly for conferences but also for trainings. Conferences were found interesting and inspirational, but interviewees could not say if they can utilize the things heard and learned in the conferences in their daily job. Sometimes the conferences do not bring anything new but are nice to attend.

Employees have the freedom to choose the trainings and conferences but they need at least a formal approval from their superior. Some interviewees said that more guidance and structure for this could be useful. The employees could be activated more and guided how they should develop themselves. Considering the trainings, it should be evaluated better that both individual needs and organizational interests meet.



*“There could be more the kind of ‘we hope that you would develop on these things’ and that there would be planning of the trainings where one could participate, so what is the perception of the person’s interest and on the other hand what is the company’s need”,* said informant D.

The employees could be activated more and guided how they should develop themselves. At the moment, choosing the trainings and going to those is more or less up to employee’s initiative. The employees have access to a list from where you can see who has attended to which conference or training and thus get some ideas where to attend. It was criticized that there should be also comments and recommendations by the people who have participated in the events on the list so that it would help in choosing the most suitable ones. Hearing from others about useful training options is seen beneficial. According to informant A the list is mainly about conferences and more information on the trainings and courses is needed. Employees appreciate the opportunity to go to conferences and trainings and one interviewee said that possibility to use working hours for trainings is also adding equality because people with family have less time to train on their own which is important in the industry where constant learning is needed.

Depending on the conference, the participants will have a presentation at the office afterwards. Interviewees had dissenting opinions on whether the presentations are useful or not. There is a lack of forum where to properly share the experiences and gained knowledge and it is often done within competence teams only. Although the presentation slides are shared afterwards, people might not find them because the document management is messy.

Two of the interviewees said that they have had competence development discussions with their superior where milestones were checked but it was not focused around choosing or agreeing on the trainings. Before using the training budget there is at least formal discussion between the employee and the superior but afterwards there is no follow up about how the training went or how the learnt skills can now be utilized. It was also mentioned that the training budget could be used more reasonably if there were more compact courses instead of couple of expensive conferences.

One interviewee thinks that there is a need for internal coaching and the skills under the roof should be utilized better and shared. Another employee also said that company X has huge amount of knowledge and senior level employees from whom others could learn but

the knowledge should be transferred somehow. There have been meetings around competences but according to the interviewee they are too general. There will be competency communities which are hoped to be more efficient so that actual skills can be learnt. Informant A said that there had been a discussion about gathering around topics instead of just competences and, thus, sharing things more broadly within the organization. There is a possibility to talk to senior employees or others and ask for help and guidance but it is up to the person's initiative to do that and sometimes it can be difficult to find motivation for it. One interviewee suggested that company should organize improvising course to everyone so that people would find new tools for working with customers. Workshops with customers are constructed almost always the same and finding new ways to organize them would help getting more out of the customer work which is significant part of the job.

The findings in the interviews are similar to online survey but brought wider understanding of the career development expectations and revealed few problematics in the current practices. Like in the online questionnaire, it cannot be withdrawn that employees of certain nationality, age or role would focus on particular topics but the researcher found one conjunctive factor. Researcher found out that there are two teams within the organization, let's name them team 1 and team 2. Team 1 has lot of on-going projects and thus the employees have more opportunities to choose which projects to participate in. In team 2, especially the developers have had less projects recently and thus little power to choose projects by preference. This can explain why there are different thoughts and opinions on the matter of being able to influence on one's tasks.

#### **4.4 Summarized findings of the empirical research**

In both data collections, employees' appreciation towards career development opportunities became clear. Employees think that career development opportunities are important and they appreciate that they exist. Online questionnaire and interviews both revealed that employees in company X want to develop their knowledge and knowhow but expectations on career progress depend on individual. In both sample groups there were employees who were looking for promotions either in terms of superior role or project lead but also those who specifically wished not to get managerial responsibility. Common for both groups were the motivation and willingness to learn new things and become better in one's job.

Trainings and competence development were seen as important career development efforts. In both sample groups, employees hoped to get more guidance from their superiors

in planning which trainings to attend and which skills to develop. Development process could be more structured and tied to concrete tasks as well as to organization's needs. In the online questionnaire results on-the-job learning was highlighted and several respondents said that besides learning new skills, they need tasks where to apply them in order to truly learn and develop. Need for more challenging tasks in order to learn kept repeating in online questionnaire results and also one interviewee brought this up.

Coaching and helping others were themes that emerged also in both sample groups. Utilising the existing skills and knowledge within the company could be done more and respondents thought that coaching or mentoring were good ways to learn from more experienced people. Sharing knowledge within competences e.g. among user experience designers has been done, but, according to the interviews, it is not always effective. To conclude, the findings show that company X has already put efforts in career development but there is not a clear individual career development process that would be planned, discussed and followed through with a superior. More employee-superior time to talk about current tasks and future development is needed among the employees as well as more effective ways to share the skills and knowledge inside the house. There is not a specific group that would stand out with special needs, but most of the themes were mentioned by people of different role, years spent in working life, years spent in organization X or nationality. Thus, it can be said that the sample groups in both online questionnaire and interviews are presentable and the measures that company X is ought to take, will serve both Finns and foreigners and all employees despite the role within organization.

Although the sample is presentable, it is still quite small. 25,6% of the employees responded to the online survey which means 23 respondents. The percentage is lower than hoped, although several reminders were sent by the company HR. The low response rate was surprising although the company HR was involved and in the previous personnel inquiry within the company career development was popular topic. Still, the data provides very useful insight as those who responded were clearly interested in the topic and their answers were rich. Thus, the data will help the researcher to structure career development processes for company X. Face to face interviews which took place after the online questionnaire improve the validity and reliability as they offered deeper insight to employees' career development expectations and wishes and also provided more insight to the international aspect that needs to be considered in this research.

The validity of a research is measured by considering the appropriateness of the measures used, accuracy of the analysis and generalizability of the findings whereas reliability refers to the replication and consistency. To ensure the validity and reliability, data

has to be treated carefully and properly. Transparency of data handling is very essential in sense of reliability. (Saunders & al. 2016, 202, 726.) The appropriateness of the used measures in this research have already been justified as qualitative case study research was the most suitable option in studying a group, company X. Data was handled confidentially and all participants of the research were informed what the research was about beforehand. Data has been analyzed truthfully but to protect anonymity, the respondents' answers cannot be attached to the appendices as they include plenty of information that could reveal the person's identity or at least raise suspicions of it.

The data was collected first through an online questionnaire which was introduced and shared among the entire organization by the company HR. As the data was qualitative, it had to be analyzed response at a time. The researcher collected the repeating themes and made comparisons between the answers with the help of Excel but could not find conjunctive factors between themes and positioning of the respondents. Online questionnaire provided useful general insight on the employees' career expectations and already helped the researcher in forming career development strategy guidelines and practices. Still, the online questionnaire left the researcher with questions still to be answered and semi-constructed face to face interviews were held with four employees. Because only two respondents of the online questionnaire were foreigners, the researcher chose to interview both Finnish and foreign employees in order to get more insight to the international aspect and find out if there were differences between Finns' and foreigners' career development expectations.

Case study researches have been criticized due to the lack of generalizability (Noor 2008) but this research is not aiming for it. The aim of this research is to provide company X tools to implement career development models and practices instead of providing the tools for wider audience. Of course, there are many other companies alike in terms of industry and size so the policies and procedures found good for company X might be beneficial to other companies as well, but the purpose of this study is not to achieve universal wide generalizability.

#### **4.5 Action plan for forming career development process**

People are in charge of their own career development. Career development needs to be self-empowered because despite the variety of development opportunities offered the person himself / herself has to seize them. In ICT and especially in digital technology industry people have to develop themselves continuously to keep on track as technologies change

and to some extent it is possible to study things on your own. Still, the importance of organization's career development efforts cannot be emphasized enough. The benefits of organization's career development efforts have already been discussed and now it is time to discuss how company X can achieve these benefits as well.

Career development efforts are most beneficial when they feed both employee needs and employer need. In company X the skillful employees are an asset as well as the technologies they manage. Before taking any actions on planning or implementing career development activities, the company needs to have clear vision about the skills and knowledge they need to remain competitive. In this industry companies have different technology stacks they use in solving their customer's needs. In case of company X, it is necessary to evaluate whether the current technology stack is enough or whether there is something that could be helpful in winning bidding competitions or in providing even better solutions to customers. This research's purpose is not to evaluate this matter but it should be the first step of creating career development process. Depending on the direction the company decides to go regarding its technologies, the company might have to recruit people with certain skills or train current employees so it has a direct impact on the focus of career development efforts.

After analyzing the company's needs and making them visible to employees, the existing skills and the level of them should be clarified. Gómez-Mejía & al. (2016, 300) presents the idea of skills inventory which means a record of employees' abilities, skills, knowledge and education which gives comprehensive picture of the employees' training and development needs. The inventory should be maintained by the company. The researcher suggests that company X should build skills inventory that would guide in planning the training offering. The inventory can be done simultaneously with the employees' self-assessment phase.

Self-assessment is important if the companies want to encourage the employee-empowered career development (Gómez-Mejía & al. (2016, 294). The goal of self-assessment is to identify employees' strengths and weaknesses. Knowing one's strengths and weaknesses help determine what kind of career steps could be taken and what possible challenges need to be overcome before entering certain positions or undertaking specific tasks. The company should organize career planning workshops where self-assessments are made. Career planning workshop could be a part of kick-off event where company's development initiatives are shared with the employees. To emphasize that the company wants to invest in this matter, the kick-off event and career planning workshop should be organized during the regular working hours, not as an afterwork activity.

The figure 5 is an example of self-assessment test, the skills would be replaced according to the skills inside the company. Because there are different roles within the company that include different skills, the self-assessment test of designers should differ to the one of developers. The self-assessment should not only measure the skills in certain competence but also the interest towards it. Company X has very different tasks and projects and thus everybody does not have to have the same skillset. By finding out the level of interest towards certain competence area, the employees can be guided to develop the skills they find interesting to make it meaningful.

Use the scales below to rate yourself on each of the following skills. Rate each skill area both for your level of proficiency and for your preference.

**Proficiency:**

1	2	3
Still learning	OK – competent	Proficient

**Preference:**

1	2	3
Don't like to use this skill	OK – Don't particularly like or dislike using this skill	Really enjoy using this skill

Skill Area	Proficiency	×	Preference	=	Score
1. Problem solving	_____		_____		_____
2. Team presentation	_____		_____		_____
3. Leadership	_____		_____		_____
4. Inventory	_____		_____		_____
5. Negotiation	_____		_____		_____
6. Conflict management	_____		_____		_____
7. Scheduling	_____		_____		_____
8. Delegation	_____		_____		_____
9. Participative management	_____		_____		_____
10. Feedback	_____		_____		_____
11. Planning	_____		_____		_____
12. Computer	_____		_____		_____
13. Social media	_____		_____		_____

Figure 5. Sample Skills Assessment Exercise (Gómez-Mejía, 2016, 295).

Reckoning the importance of career anchors in making career choices, finding out one's career anchor should be part of the career-planning process. Edgar Schein has published manuals, such as Career Anchors: self-assessment (2006) and Career Anchors: participant workbook (2006), that help in identifying individual career anchor and those could be used as help. There are different positions and jobs in company X and depending on the career anchor, they might not suit for everyone. E.g. some of the employees work most of the week at their customer premises which may cause changes in terms of working hours, dress codes and norms. For autonomy anchored person this could be unpleasant and the

person might feel too restricted if the environment is not providing enough freedom. If a new position working at customer's premises would open and it would mean include norms that decrease the level of freedom, it might be clever not to place autonomy anchored employee there but choose someone else. Making self-assessments and identifying career anchors can increase the self-awareness of employees and help them in identifying their career hopes and so help the company to guide them to direction that please both parties.

The results of the self-assessments can be discussed in general level with all employees to ensure common understanding on the importance of the matter but more detailed discussions should take place afterwards in private face to face sessions where manager's role highlights. Researcher suggests that HR should take part in these sessions or at least discuss about them with the managers beforehand to ensure that the process of career development proceeds as planned. It was found out in the empirical research that employees would like to have more time with their superiors to talk about work related matters and some said directly that they needed guidance in planning their career development. In a company of 90 people, this can become very time consuming and start to take time from other tasks which are just as important. Therefore, it is even more important that employees have thought about their hopes and needs beforehand in the workshop so that the face to face time can be focused more on the actions to be taken instead of just defining the current situation. Based on the needs and interest of the employee, the manager or superior can guide and advice the employee in which ways she / he can develop specific skills or what needs to be done before the employee is ready to work on certain project or position that she / he has hopes for.

Before the superiors can suggest development activities to employees, the company has to align them. Company X already has a training budget that can be used for courses, conferences or trainings. It turned out in the empirical research that there was a list of conferences and trainings that people have used and sometimes superiors post about trainings in internal communication channels. The list could be utilized better so that people who have attended to events, have to post comments on them afterwards. This would provide employees valuable information about how their colleagues have experienced training A, was it useful, what was learned and in which case it could be recommended.

The employees hoped that the company would make this more systematic and that skills learnt in certain courses could be also utilized at work. At the moment there isn't much discussion about going to certain training but basically the employees just need a formal approval. Afterwards, there is no discussion either with superior, but depending on the

event, the participants might give presentations on the topic. Employees seem to enjoy the freedom to choose the events themselves and it should not be restricted but in the first discussions after the workshop, the superior and employee should look at the skills that should be developed and go through the conference / training offering and see which ones will support the development and primarily the employee should attend to those if not agreed otherwise.

The benefits of having presentations were disputed and it clearly depends on the event participated. Inspirational conference can be difficult to translate to others so that people would actually learn from it or if someone has been on a course to learn a skill and has got a certificate of it, despite teaching colleagues, they will not be certified unless they take the same course. The benefits of having the presentations might be best for the participants themselves because they get to reflect on their learning while presenting the experience to others. This is also a way to inform others of useful trainings or conferences. Depending on the topic, it should be evaluated together with the superior whether it is useful to have the presentation and if yes, whether it should be held with the competence community only or to wider audience. Another option could be to write short reports where employees comment on the trainings or conferences and evaluate their learning. In the report, the employees could also rate the event and give recommendations on who should attend it and why.

The employee should be offered tasks and projects where the learned skills can be used. If the learning is not tied to concrete tasks, there is a risk that the company will not gain anything from the employees' development, the employee might not learn to fully master the skill in real work life context or can become frustrated of not being able to utilize one's full potential. Trainings that provide certificates are expensive and having them can increase the employee's market value and if the company is not able to offer tasks where the certified skills can be used, the employee might start looking alternative options. Therefore, it is important to support on-the-job learning simultaneously with trainings.

Empirical research revealed that employees in company X would like to develop and learn more while working. On-the-job learning kept repeating and employees wished to have more challenging and varying tasks to develop their skills and also gain new skills. The company could implement job rotations, so that people who are interested could take part into projects where they would learn things outside their own competence area and get new challenges. Job rotation suits especially employees who wish to expand their competence area but might not serve a person who wishes to maintain very specialized and narrow focus (Gómez-Mejía 2016, 305). Job rotations should be coordinated by the superiors



who work as team leads because they have the best view on the on-going and up-coming projects and based on the face to face discussions they also know to whom suggest it. This could be made more visible in posting publicly in internal communication channels all the new up-coming projects and the skills needed in them. Employees could estimate together with their superior whether the project would be a suitable opportunity to expand to a new field of expertise.

Utilizing existing skills and knowledge in developing employees is not only cost effective but can be performed in real work life context. Senior employees can help employees in specific competence areas by helping them with concrete tasks and guiding them on how to solve different type of problems. Senior employees already coach others but it is up to the employee to go and ask for help. Naturally the senior employees are also working on projects themselves so it will require organizing but superiors could work as facilitators here and coordinate the coaching process. Superiors could reserve couple of days a month so that both senior employees and the ones who can learn from them would work at the office premises at the same time. Both parties could work on their own tasks but help would be close by when needed and the threshold for asking help would be lower. Empirical research showed that asking for help is possible and people do that but if the company wants to make sure that seniors share their wisdom there needs to be clear forum for it and it needs to be provided by the company.

Like discussed in chapter 3.3 the career paths need to be visible for the employees. Company X has a pay grade model from trainee to lead position which is a one type of career path. It is important that the company makes sure that the qualifications for each position are clear so that the paths are realistic. It needs to be clearly articulated and explained what is needed for each step in addition with a description of the minimum length the employee should spend on one step to accomplish needed skillset (Gómez-Mejía 2016, 300). As the company has different roles, the path described in the pay grade model can't be the only career path. Lateral career moves from developing to project management should be also considered as well as the expansion of expertise. To make it clearer for the employees, all the positions inside the company should be listed along with the main responsibilities, so that everybody stays on track what kind of career choices are possible inside the company.

Although the researcher suggests inclusive approach to talent management and based on the discussions with the company HR it is the obvious option for company X, succession planning should not be dismissed. It's important to include everyone in the talent develop-

ment and offer equal opportunities for development, but the company should also pay attention to top performers and think how to develop them for executive roles. The company has limited number of executive roles and the turnover of executive roles is low but as business life is full of surprises, company X needs to be prepared. Succession planning does not only serve the company's needs in making long term plans for leadership but it also helps to engage the top performers if they can be promised significant career steps.

Career development process consists of multiple things and it's a continuous cycle rather than a line with starting point and end. The career expectations of individuals can change over time as well as the organization's interests and, thus, individual assessments and organizational needs have to be re-evaluated from time to time. Figure 6 summarizes the action points and practices that researcher suggests for company X in order to develop and maintain successful and coherent career development process.



Figure 6. Summarized action plan for career development process.

## 5 Discussions

The researcher had pre-assumptions on the employees' career expectations. The researcher thought that promotions and managerial positions would be the most common expectations but instead it was developing skills and becoming better in the job. Industry is one thing that impacts on this because it's important to learn new skills and technologies to remain competent and the employees understand it as well. It may be also a matter of profession that developers and designers want to keep on doing the job itself instead of moving to executive positions where managerial things can easily replace the concrete work of a designer or developer. This still does not mean that a developer would only want to code for the rest of his/her life, but instead of managerial responsibility the position can include e.g. consulting customers or coaching junior developers. Although the researcher had familiarized herself with career paths, during the research it truly revealed that lateral career paths exist and are important because not everybody can or want to work as manager or executive.

As discovered in the findings, nationality of the respondents did not impact the content of the answers. This may be due to the fact that talent management and talent development are global concepts and employees are expecting development opportunities despite the country or culture they work in. It would be interesting to compare these results with a similar study to another industry to see if there are cultural differences in other industries or is this something that concerns ICT only. Naturally, due to the research's nature, it cannot be generalized that career expectations in ICT industry do not differ between cultures.

When looking back at designing and implementing the empirical research, the researcher feels that she would have benefitted greatly if the compulsory research methods course would have been at the same time with starting the thesis. The researcher struggled in explaining the research philosophies and methods and understands that this part could have been more profound. Still, the data was collected and handled properly. Important findings were made and based on those the researcher was able to make improvement suggestions for company X that create concrete value.

Some of the findings in the data collection were already familiar to the company as the topics had emerged in employee satisfaction surveys but the research managed to bring more insight to these matters. The findings brought new things as well and the company found online questionnaire data especially useful as it reveals how the employees feel about career development, how it works in the company in their opinion and that there is a need for more structured process around career development. The research gave new

thoughts to the company how they could utilize the existing knowledge and talent in internal development and coaching and how career paths could be clarified. The importance of 1-to-1 discussions on the topic between employee and supervisor as well as following the individual learning more were noted.

The action plan was warmly welcomed and according to company HR it gave practical hands on instructions how things could be done. Career workshops with self-assessments were new approaches that could fit the company culture well. The topic of talent development was one of the listed development themes in the company and like explained before, certain career development efforts have already been taken into practice. This research gives tools that can be used in creating comprehensive career development model. Currently, the company is creating a pilot that concerns learning and it will be defined e.g. how competence on certain technology will be measured, developed and tested and the results of this research can be utilized in this. On-the-job learning, which was one of the central themes of career development expectations, could be an aspect for the pilot as well.

Creating coherent career development process demands attention and efforts in multiple steps on the way. The benefits of career development efforts are undeniable as they help to fulfill both organizational and individual needs. If the company is able to execute career development process that combines these two, it is more likely to succeed in the sense of having skillful, motivated and committed employees. The research provides company X with tools and ideas from where and how to start building coherent and structured career development process.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Online questionnaire form

Career development opportunities in company X

Your employer wants to support you better in your career path and thus it's important that you share your career expectations and wishes. Company X wants to hear its employees' thoughts in order to develop relevant career development models & practices.

This questionnaire is conducted by Anna-Katariina Parkkasaari as part of master thesis, a research that aims to create career development strategy for company X. The results are handled anonymously and confidentially. Thank you in advance!

1. What is your role within the organization? \*

Admin (office, hr, finance, marketing..)

Designer

Developer

Project manager / project coordinator

2. How long have you been in working life altogether in years? \*

0-2

3-4

5-6

7-9

10+

3. How many years have you worked for your current employer? \*

0-2

3-4

5-6

7-9

10+

4. Are you working as a supervisor? \*

Yes

No

5. What is your nationality? \*

*The question is asked due to research's international aspect*

6. How important do you consider career development opportunities? \*

1 not important at all

2 not very important

3 neutral

4 important

5 very important

7. How satisfied are you with career development opportunities within your current employer? \*

1 very unsatisfied

2 unsatisfied

3 neutral

4 satisfied

5 very satisfied

8. What are your career development expectations? \*

*How do you wish to grow as a professional?*

9. If you think about your career in the future, what things are most important to you? \*

*For example, how important do you see things such as getting more responsibility, promotion opportunities, self-development opportunities or utilizing your full professional potential? What other things matter to you considering your career progression?*

10. In which position do you wish to see yourself within next 3 years in your career? \*

*What do you want to achieve?*

11. What kind of career development support do you wish to get from your employer? \*

*For example, are you interested in trainings, planning career path with your supervisor or more responsibility which allows you to challenge yourself? What else could it be on your opinion?*



## Appendix 2. Interview guidelines

### 1. Career expectations – growing as professional

How do you want to grow as professional? Where does your career expectations lead you? Why is that important factor?

How does the following resonate to you?

- By developing knowledge and learning new skills people become experts in their fields and better in their jobs
- Learning new things requires more challenging tasks
- More responsibility is connected with increased independence to conduct projects and freedom to choose tasks

### 2. Important things – what matters to you in working life

What would you not let go of? Why?

Are there career steps you could take but would require compromises?

Examples:

- self-development opportunities
- having influence inside the organization
- work-life balance
- interesting tasks
- career progress
- good pay

### 3. Individual three-year career plan

What is it in that position that makes it appealing?

What would that position allow?

### 4. Career development efforts by the organization

Do you have an opportunity to utilize available trainings/workshops? Have you used training budget?

What kind of career development efforts do you need from your employer?

How would that thing help you to reach your career goals?

Are the trainings tied to concrete tasks? Is there follow ups?

Have you spent time with your superior for career planning? Would you need this?