FEATURE

Shifting the Employee Development Model – Transparency and Collaboration Creates Success

by Stephane McShane, Maxim Consulting Group

The importance of attracting, retaining, and developing employees in the construction industry has hit an all time high. Keeping our valued staff employed within our organizations can be one of the most effective ways to influence both culture and financial performance. In lieu of using hope as a strategy in this process, a measured approach should be taken to maximize the effectiveness of your development program. Below is a four-step approach to shift your employee development model to a more collaborative approach, creating the opportunity for both employee longevity and engagement.

Step 1: Defining Strategy

For those who have read Steven Covey's books, it is crucial to begin with the end in mind. What are the desired outcomes from an employee development program? This first starts with questioning what is different today. The needs of today's workers have shifted away from the needs of so many construction leaders who are from a different generation. The expectations of the Baby Boomer generation as well as Gen X are vastly different than what the Millennials or Gen Z require of their career path. The younger generations of workers require the information, the data, about the positions within the organization so that they can play an active role in managing their development. They want to decide when and how quickly to climb the ladder vertically, as depicted in Figure 1.

In addition, they would like to freedom to make a move horizontally as well. Should they tire of the current position and wish to try something different, this lateral movement must also be considered (Figure 2).

Having clear paths of movement such as the examples above will enable employees to understand clearly what moves are available to them, with enough detail to make educated decisions about where they would like to go.

Gone are the days where an employee sits idly by and hopes that someone, sometime, graces them with a promotion or opportunity. These generations want to drive, not ride, that road to success. In summary, they are looking for:

- Involvement
- Collaboration
- Consistent communication
- Action
- Clarity
- Timeliness

Step 2: Creating Structure

A prescribed approach to defining the requirements of each position allows employees to self-educate. A skillset matrix for every named position within the organization should be developed so that misinformation about the responsibilities of a position are avoided. As an example, below is a list of skills that could be listed on a skillset matrix for a project manager:

- Cost Codes
- Budgeting
- Schedule of Values
- Preconstruction Planning
- Bulk Buy
- Prefabrication and Kitting
- Submittals
- Production Tracking
- Change Order Management
- RFIs
- Projections
- Billing and Collections
- Accounting/Job Cost System
- Document Management
- Estimating
- Customer Management
- Company Culture
- Community and Volunteerism

Taking this approach one step further, having a definition behind what each of the skill sets required of a position would provide even more information to employees looking to improve, promote, or lateral move within an organization. For example:

Cost Codes

- Standard definitions
- Standard unit of measures

Since skillsets are only part of the definition of success, positions within the organization, where appropriate, should also have revenue and margin contribution expectations defined. Should a position not have revenue and margin expectations, other metrics must be evaluated, defined, and implemented.

Step 3: Outlining the Development Process

Self-Evaluation

The process of collaborative employee development might look like the following: Once a year, in the same week per year, the employee does a self-evaluation of the skillsets required of the position they currently hold. They will score themselves using a standard scoring system, something like the example below:

- Score of 0 – No training has been received
- Score of 1 – Training received, but is not yet using the skill

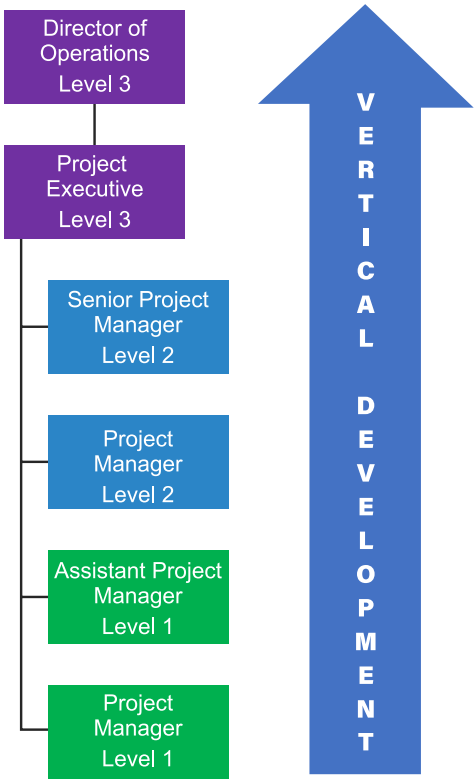

Figure 1

- Score of 2 – Can perform the skill with oversight
- Score of 3 – Can perform the skill without any oversight
- Score of 4 – Is a published subject matter expert in the skill

Supervisor Pre-Evaluation

Their supervisor may also perform their own assessment at the same time or before the employee completes theirs. This will allow for time to review reference materials and allow for proper preparation.

Collaboration Session

During the collaboration session, the employee and supervisor meet to discuss the employee's self-evaluation. If any deltas exist between the supervisor's scores and the employee's scores, then they should discuss to educate, coach, and collaborate on what the final score should be. This should ALWAYS be stressed as a building and coaching session, and the employee's opportunity to map out a plan by first discovering where they are today and identifying where they want to go.

Career Path Map

At this point, a career path map may be cast to discuss the employee's needs and discover what portions of their work they are most passionate about. Define the desired end goal, but leave open the opportunity that they can, and may wish to, change their course down the road. It is important to paint a picture where the employee drives not only where they go but plays the most important role in how long it takes to get there. An example is shown in Figure 3 on the next page.

One Year Action Plan

Once the overall career path map is laid out, a realistic one-year development action plan should be cast. It should be clear that in a vertical progression, skillset and financial target mastery are paramount in the ability to progress. Collaboratively, identify those skillsets needed to further their success in their current position. Or, if they are nearing the top of their position and are readying for a promotion, those skillsets needed to help them be successful from the beginning of their next promotion. The action plan should include:

1. A list of the skillsets needed to gain ground in the next year
2. The person responsible (a subject matter expert or mentor) for helping the employee develop the skill
3. The due date for the skill level mastery
4. A notes section for additional information

Manager Once Removed

The supervisor should then take these assessments and action plans to their supervisor to review and approve. It is imperative to have an objective set of eyes look at this to ensure that no favoritism or loss of objectivity is occurring.

Quarterly or Six Month Check In

Quarterly (best) or at the very least a six-month interval, a formal follow up with the employee is critical. This does not negate the need to have a conversation in between to ensure that they are accomplishing their goals

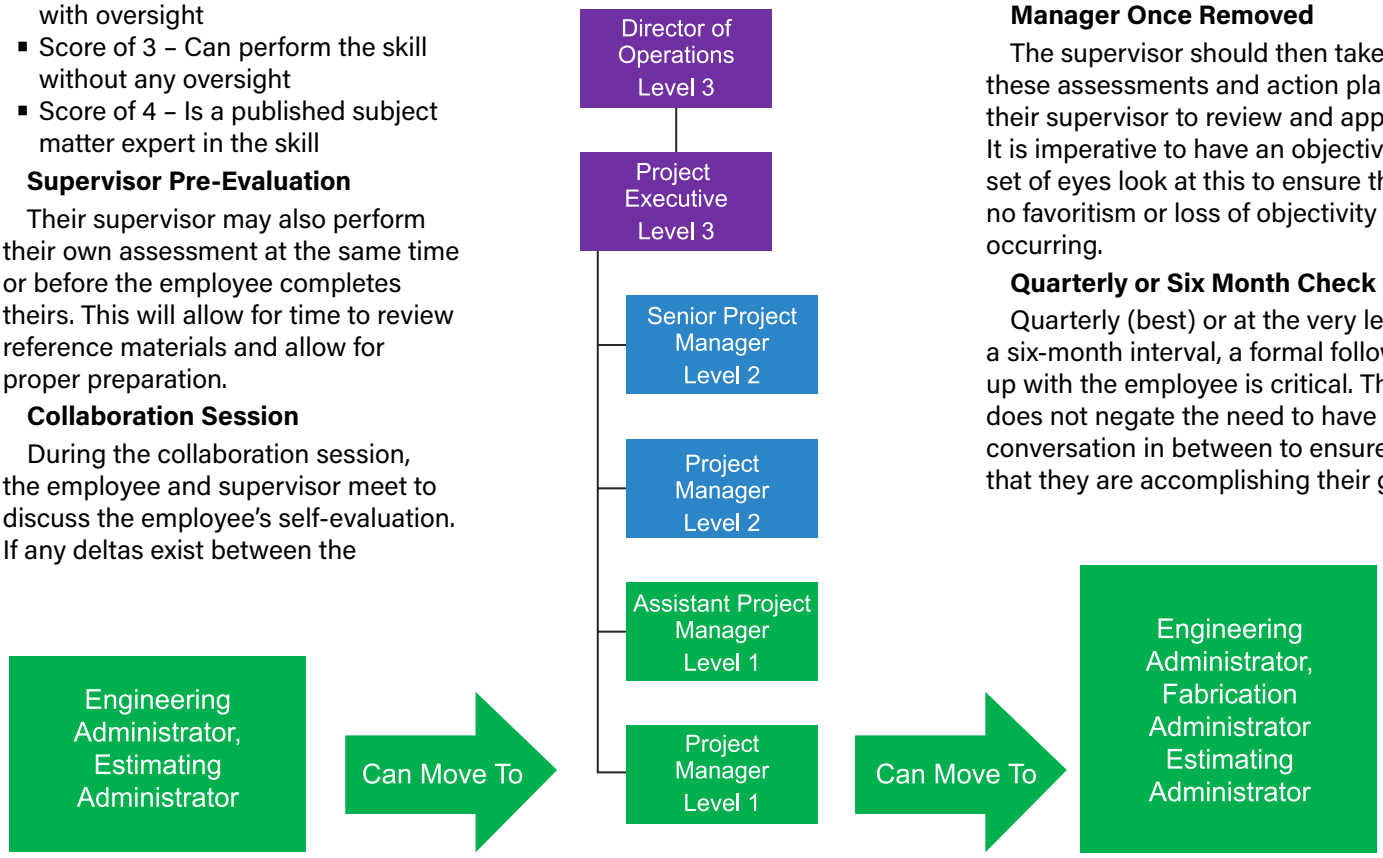

Figure 2

and to see if assistance is needed. At this meeting, the parties will review the career path map to ensure it is still what the employee desires, making changes if it is not, and reviewing the action plan, making changes as necessary. Make certain to celebrate the successes and coach through the challenges. Depending on which study is referenced, 85-90% of millennials prefer face to face coaching. This is leadership's one opportunity to show the employee that we are engaged in helping them to succeed.

Re-assess Annually

The employee development process should be re-run every single year, always referencing the long-term goal, then breaking it down into the goals needed to be mastered that year to keep it relevant to today. This allows for frequent touch, and increased opportunities to have the critical conversations that employees today demand.

The Pitfalls to Avoid

Because the concept of allowing the employee to own the direction and the speed of their development is a new concept to many, there are some painful pitfalls to avoid. They are:

Lack of consistency. Allowing dates of development meetings to slip or cancel shows an employee that you are not as engaged in their progression as they need you to be. This breaks down trust and can cause irreparable damage.

Lack of commitment by leaders/teachers/mentors. If someone is entrusted with being a leader, mentor, subject matter expert, or teacher, then they need to have the time to do just that. The effectiveness of your future staff depends on that mentor being able to carve out enough time to effectively teach the skillset you are requiring of the employee.

Lack of incentives. The question of what will occur if the employee achieves the goals outlined must be answered. If all your development process is documented, clear, and with sufficient detail to prevent ambiguity, risks are minimized. The employee needs to understand what is in it for them when they achieve what they said they were going to do. False promises have no place here. Nothing can occur that would cause an employee to doubt what they are being told.

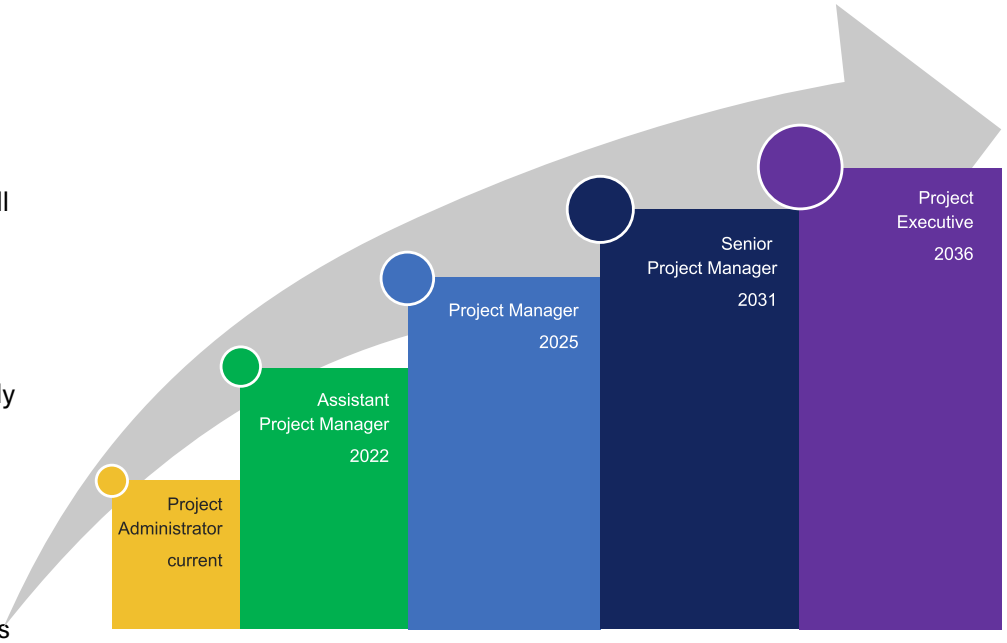

Figure 3

Lack of positive reinforcement. Failing to allow the employees to hear, and feel, their successes robs them of the fuel to achieve the next goal. Many leaders in the industry are quick to point out the negatives or shortcomings. The best leaders never miss an opportunity to celebrate the successes. That only creates additional desire for the employee to achieve more.

Summary

Employee development today appears and performs vastly different than in years past. The era of the person who spends the most time in their office chair gets the promotion is over. Time does not equal success. Success equals success. For companies to engage, empower, and inspire their staff toward stellar performance takes trust, communication, collaboration, and commitment. It is time to go all in to ensure that we have a program in place to develop our own superstars, instead of hoping one can be robbed from a competitor somewhere. Hope is not the right strategy for effective leadership to take. Strategy, structure, and process is not just for operations anymore. It is also the transparency needed to allow greatness to develop from within our own walls.

About the Author

*Stephane McShane is a Director at Maxim Consulting Group, responsible for the evaluation and implementation processes with clients. Stephane works with construction related firms of all sizes to evaluate business practices and assist with management challenges. With a large depth of experience working in the construction industry from the field to the executive suite, Stephane is keenly aware of the business and, most specifically, operational challenges firms' face. Her areas of expertise include: Leadership development, organizational assessments, peer group facilitation, strategic planning, project execution, business development, productivity improvement, and training programs. Mrs. McShane is an internationally recognized speaker, mentor, author, and teacher. She can be reached at **stephane.mcshane@maximconsulting.com**. For more information, see Maxim's website at **www.maximconsulting.com**.*