

Career Development as Strategy: A Practical Guide to Creating Internal Career Centres

Playbook

Taryn Blanchard, Sheila Rider, and Lisa Taylor



Copyright © 2026 Challenge Factory Inc.
All rights reserved.

Challenge Factory Inc.
1235 Bay Street
Suite 700
Toronto, ON M5R 3K4
Canada

1-416-217-0777
www.challengefactory.ca
consulting@challengefactory.ca

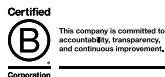
ISBN
Paperback: 978-1-996817-00-1
PDF: 978-1-996817-01-8
Authors: Taryn Blanchard, Sheila Rider, Lisa Taylor

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law. Every reasonable effort has been made to identify the owners of copyright material reproduced in this publication and to comply with Canadian Copyright law. The publisher would welcome any information regarding errors or omissions. Wholesale discounts for book orders are available through Ingram Distributors.

Published by:

CERIC
2 St Clair Avenue East
Suite 300
Toronto, ON M4T 2T5
Canada

www.ceric.ca
admin@ceric.ca



About Challenge Factory

Challenge Factory is a trusted Canadian research and advisory services firm that helps organizations achieve productivity gains and impact that lasts. Grounded in best practices from the international field of career development and guided by our conviction that the Future of Work is human, we bring an interdisciplinary lens to designing workplaces where people thrive and organizations meet today's toughest workforce challenges with clarity and confidence.

As a proud B Corporation, we focus on purpose-driven strategies that unlock hidden workforce potential and drive change not only within organizations, but across the sectors and communities they influence. Our clients, from corporations to governments to higher education institutions, turn to us for innovative solutions that challenge assumptions, simplify complexity, and deliver measurable outcomes.

www.challengefactory.ca

About CERIC

CERIC is a charitable organization that advances education and research in career counselling and career development, in order to increase the economic and social well-being of people in Canada. It funds projects to develop innovative resources that build the knowledge and skills of diverse career and employment professionals. CERIC also annually hosts Cannexus, Canada's largest bilingual career development conference, publishes the country's only peer-reviewed journal, Canadian Journal of Career Development, and runs the CareerWise / OrientAction websites, providing the top career development news and views.

www.ceric.ca

About CACEE

The Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers (CACEE) is the pan-Canadian network and leading authority for professionals focused on supporting students on their journey from post-secondary studies to career success.

CACEE empowers its members by providing access to expertise, tools, exchange of ideas, relationships, thought leadership, and resources needed to excel in their work.

CACEE's offerings include micro-credential and certificate programs, regional PD events, community of practice roundtable discussions, virtual workshops and webinars, networking opportunities, research and advocacy initiatives, partner access to programming offers by other national and international associations, and a national conference.

www.cacee.com

Authors

Dr. Taryn Blanchard, Director, Research & Innovation Strategy, Challenge Factory

Sheila Rider, Associate & Trusted Advisor, Challenge Factory

Lisa Taylor, Founder & CEO, Challenge Factory

Graphic Designer

Mariel Ferreras, Marketing and Graphic Design Coordinator, Challenge Factory

How to cite this publication

Blanchard, Taryn, Sheila Rider, and Lisa Taylor. *Career Development as Strategy: A Practical Guide to Creating Internal Career Centres*. CERIC, 2026.

Acknowledgments

This playbook was developed through a collaborative effort that brought together expertise from across the career development ecosystem. Funding for this playbook was generously provided in part by CERIC, whose commitment to advancing career development as a public good made this project possible. We gratefully acknowledge our project partner, the Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers (CACEE), whose insight and engagement strengthened the relevance and applicability of this work for employers, educators, and career development professionals.

Our sincere thanks go to the project's steering committee for their guidance, expertise, and stewardship throughout this work. Their strategic and thoughtful direction helped shape the playbook's design, content, and practical value for organizations across Canada. We also extend appreciation to all the Challenge Factory team members who contributed research, writing, analysis, design, and strategic guidance throughout the development of this playbook.

Thank you to the practitioners, employers, and leaders who shared their perspectives and experiences, helping ensure the tools and frameworks reflect real organizational contexts. We also recognize the broader community of career development professionals whose ongoing work and dedication continue to shape this field and inform this internal career centres initiative.

Land acknowledgment

Challenge Factory acknowledges that our head office in Toronto is situated on the traditional lands of the Huron-Wendat, Petun, Haundenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Mississauga Anishinaabe of New Credit. To learn more about the lands you live and work on, visit www.native-land.ca and www.whose.land.

About the use of artificial intelligence in this initiative

The internal career centres initiative was developed using an AI-first, human-led approach. Artificial intelligence tools were used to enhance research synthesis, writing, and design, supporting Challenge Factory's team in testing ideas and augmenting learning. Every insight, framework, and example in this playbook has been human-reviewed, curated, and contextualized to reflect Challenge Factory's expertise and labour market perspective. This collaborative use of AI demonstrates one of the core principles of the internal career centre model itself: technology can enhance how we work and learn, but people provide the insight, judgment, values, and purpose that make change meaningful.

Future-focused. Evidence-informed. Human-centred.

Dedication

For (Alexander) Emree Siaroff—still helping.

Table of Contents

Introduction: From challenge to opportunity	1
Chapter 1 Reframe – See career development as strategy.	5
Chapter 2 Architect – Design a system for growth.	15
Chapter 3 Translate – Connect people growth to business strategy	21
Chapter 4 Prepare – Assess your readiness for change.	27
Chapter 5 Benchmark – Evaluate your career development maturity.	34
Chapter 6 Persuade – Make the business case for investment and support	41
Chapter 7 Activate – Turn strategy into practice.	50
Chapter 8 Evolve – Sustain success and keep moving forward	57
Conclusion: From playbook to partnership	62
Glossary	65
Appendix A Career Development Maturity Matrix™ – Indicators by HR practice area	68
Appendix B Internal career centre business case template	72
Appendix C Conversation starters for teams	75



Introduction: From challenge to opportunity

At a glance: What this playbook will do

- Reframe career development as a core business strategy, not a set of HR programs.
- Learn a step-by-step approach to design an internal career centre.
- Apply practical tools and frameworks grounded in real organizational experience.
- Build confidence to act, aligning career growth with business goals and future readiness.

Why internal career centres matter

Across every sector, leaders are being asked to deliver more with fewer resources while navigating rapid shifts in technology, demographics, and employee expectations. Even strong HR teams struggle to keep pace because their programs (e.g., recruitment, learning, performance, mobility) focus on a variety of priorities, have evolved over time, and were never built to operate as one integrated system.

An internal career centre fills this gap. It is not a new name for HR, nor does it replace core functions like compensation, talent attraction, or total rewards. Instead, an internal career centre acts as strategic infrastructure that connects these functions and ensures career development is coordinated, visible, and aligned to business priorities.

An internal career centre brings together an organization's talent-related initiatives such as coaching, mobility, mentoring, and skills development under a single framework. By linking these efforts, it turns fragmented programs into a coherent system that strengthens retention, builds agility, and delivers measurable business results.

In short: HR runs the programs. An internal career centre ensures maximum collective impact as measured by business and employee outcomes. It makes them work together so employees can grow, managers can lead, and the organization can adapt with confidence.

What an internal career centre delivers



Consistent access to career tools, data, and conversations for every employee.



Leaders who understand how developing people drives productivity and engagement.



Data and insight that inform strategic workforce planning and decision-making.



A culture where career growth is visible, supported, and aligned with business priorities.

Challenge Factory's approach

Challenge Factory champions career development as a strategic lever for organizations to build agility, retain talent, and navigate workforce change.

This playbook is grounded in three proprietary Challenge Factory frameworks:

- Research-to-Practice methodology – which turns insight into measurable action
- Five Drivers of Workforce Change™ – which explains the external forces reshaping work
- Career Development Maturity Matrix™ – which helps organizations assess and strengthen their internal capability.

Together, these frameworks drive systems change that is future-focused, evidence-informed, and human-centred—forming the foundation for how organizations design, operate, and sustain internal career centres over time.

Who this playbook is for

This playbook is for leaders and practitioners who want to strengthen how their organization supports career growth and internal mobility. It's written for:

- HR and talent leaders building the business case for investment.
- Executives linking workforce strategy to organizational goals.
- Learning and development professionals designing future-ready programs.
- Career development practitioners seeking stronger partnerships with employers.

Whether you lead a small team or an enterprise-wide function, you'll find frameworks and examples adaptable to your scale, all designed to strengthen internal capability and workforce resilience.

How to use this playbook

Each chapter follows a consistent rhythm: learn the concept, see it applied, apply it yourself, then reflect and move forward. Before you begin, take a moment to locate your organization on the learning path that follows.

Throughout the playbook, you'll follow Asha, an HR leader navigating the same challenges many organizations face today. Her story brings the ideas to life, showing how each concept looks in practice and how theory turns into real organizational change. Use Asha's journey as a mirror for your own context: what feels familiar, what would differ, and what insights you can apply in your setting.



The view from HR: Meet Asha

Asha is a mid-career HR professional at a growing company who cares deeply about developing people.

Lately, she's frustrated. Skilled employees are leaving faster than the company can replace them, and exit interviews all sound the same: "I can't see a path forward here."

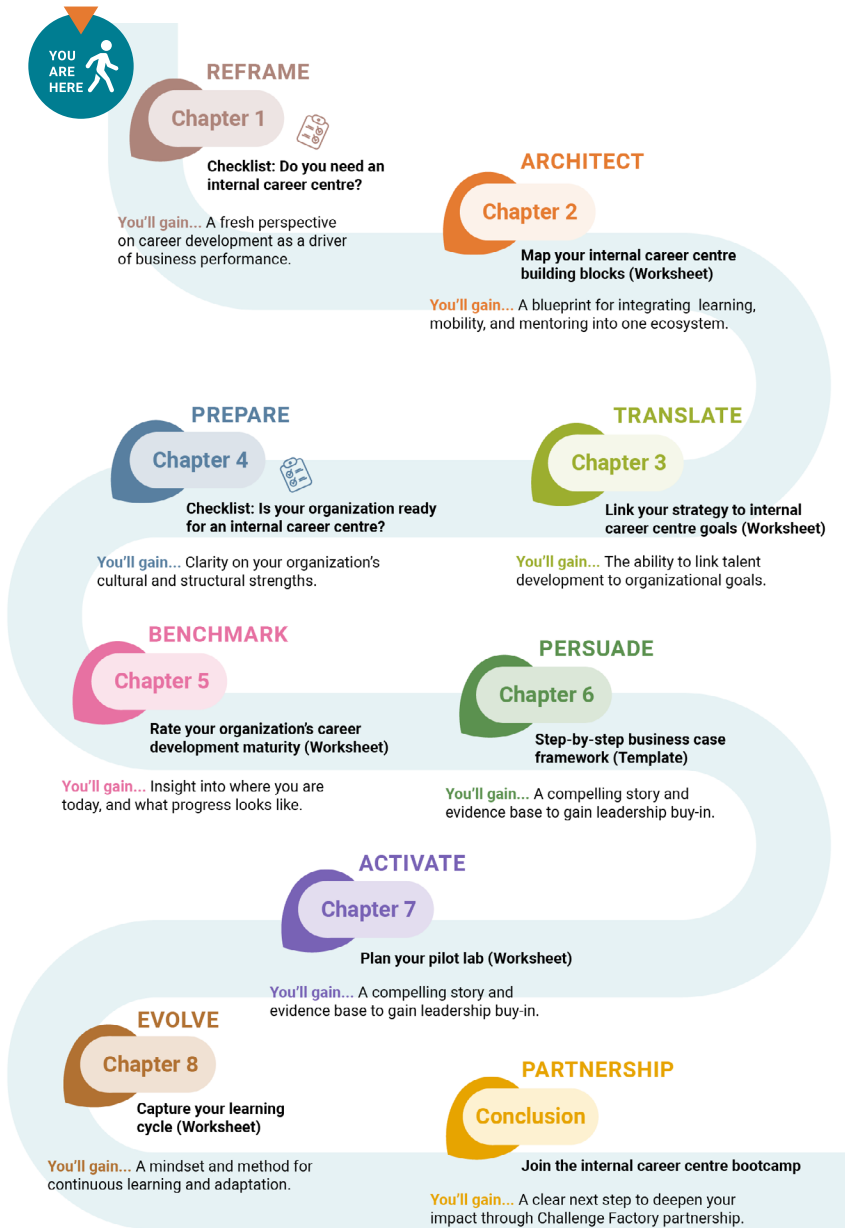
Her leaders want solutions that build retention and agility, but every new HR program feels like a short-term patch.

Asha knows something bigger needs to change. She just isn't sure what it is yet. She's ready to find a new approach that makes career growth visible and valuable for everyone.

Your learning path: From insight to embedded capability

Each stage of the playbook builds on the one before it, helping you move from awareness to action, from pilot to practice, and from internal momentum to lasting impact. Follow the path or jump to the stage that meets your organization where it is.

Figure 1. The internal career centre learning path



Chapter 1 | Reframe – See career development as strategy

At a glance: Why this chapter matters

- Recognize the workforce shifts forcing organizations to rethink career development.
- Learn what an internal career centre is and why it matters.
- Connect the business outcomes of career development to real organizational impact.
- Diagnose whether your organization shows signs of strain that an internal career centre can solve.

Your workforce wake-up call



The view from HR: Asha's wake-up call

Asha is watching the cracks form.

Three top employees just resigned, all saying the same thing: “I don’t see a path forward here.” At the same time, her executives want a workforce ready for AI and new business models.

For the first time, Asha connects the dots. The company’s biggest challenge isn’t technology or labour markets. It’s career visibility. If employees can’t see their future inside the organization, they’ll build it somewhere else.

She’s beginning to see that solving workforce issues means rethinking how careers work inside her organization.

Workforce change is accelerating. AI, automation, demographic shifts, and evolving employee expectations are disrupting traditional approaches to talent faster than organizations can adapt.

Leaders face a paradox: business success depends on people, yet the existing portfolio of talent structures and systems rarely help them grow from within.

The result?

- **Retention pressures** as employees seek growth elsewhere.
- **Skill gaps** that stall innovation.
- **Unclear or overly rigid career paths** that weaken engagement.
- **Manager fatigue** from constant backfilling and change.

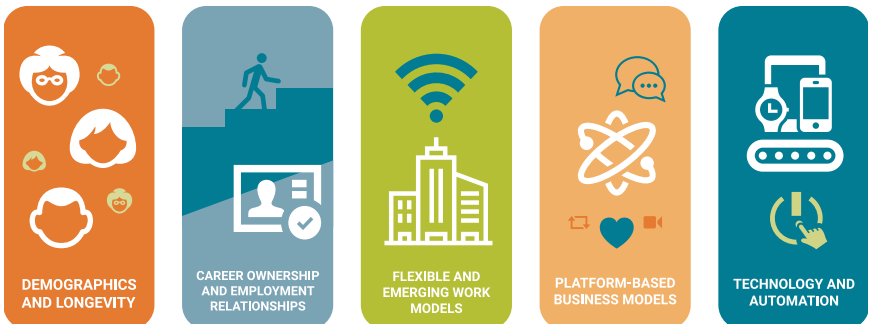
Career development can solve these problems, but only when treated as a **core capability of the business**, not a program to roll out when engagement drops or a reward system for high-performing employees.

Key insight:

Career development is the lifelong process of managing learning, work, life roles, and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future. It requires labour market awareness and reflects a shared responsibility: career development is owned by the individual, enabled by managers, and supported by the organization through visible career pathways and opportunities inside the workplace.

The 5 Drivers of Workforce Change™

Before introducing the internal career centre model, it's important to ground the conversation in why a new approach is needed. The global forces affecting today's workforces aren't isolated trends. They are reshaping every job, team, and organization simultaneously, and they disrupt both workforce demand and supply.



Challenge Factory's [Five Drivers of Workforce Change™](#) help leaders see this bigger picture. They explain why fragmented programs can't keep up, why employees struggle to see a future inside their organization, and why career development must operate as a coordinated system rather than a set of initiatives:

1. **Demographics and Longevity:** Longer careers, multigenerational workforces, and diverse and hidden talent pools require new pathways for growth and transition.
2. **Career Ownership and Employment Relationships:** Employees expect agency, flexibility, and purpose in their work, challenging the traditional social contract between employers and employees.
3. **Flexible and Emerging Work Models:** Hybrid, project-based, and portfolio careers demand adaptable internal systems.
4. **Platform-Based Business Models:** Technology enables new ecosystems of work that blur lines between internal and external talent.
5. **Technology and Automation:** AI and data tools are changing tasks and skill requirements faster than job titles can keep up.

This context explains why transformation must be systemic, not reactive. Each driver is powerful alone. Together, they make career development a competitive advantage.

Organizations that respond through a coordinated system, rather than fragmented programs, build resilience and retain critical capability.



Conversation starter:

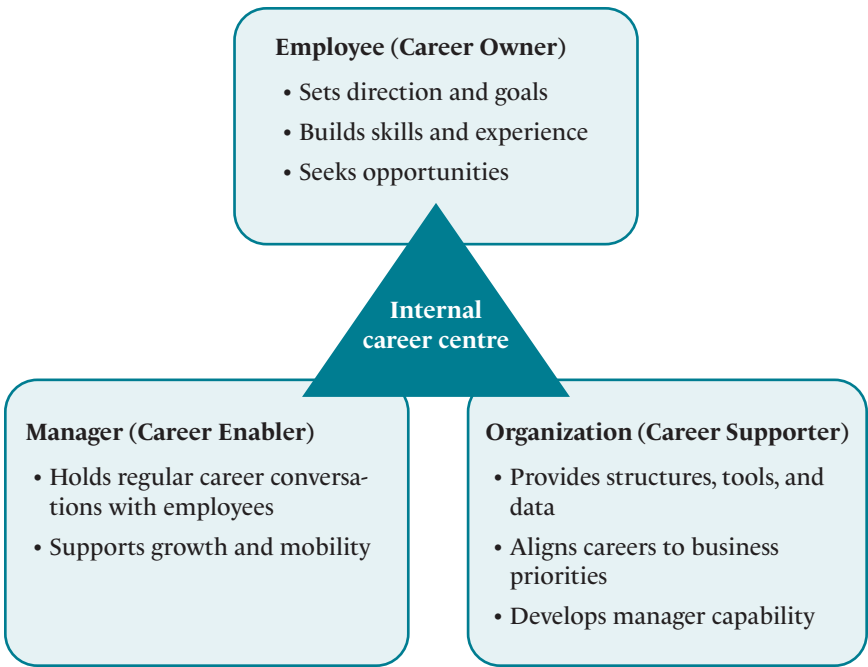
Which of the Five Drivers is creating the most pressure in your organization right now? How could stronger internal career development help you respond?

What is an internal career centre?

An internal career centre is where employee growth meets business strategy inside an organization. It brings together talent-related initiatives and workforce planning under a single cross-functional framework, turning fragmented programs into a coherent system that strengthens retention, builds agility, and delivers measurable business results.

By making roles, skills, and opportunities visible, an internal career centre reinforces the shared responsibility of career development: employees own their careers, managers act as career enablers, and the organization provides the structures, tools, and governance that make growth possible.

Figure 1.1. Career development as a shared responsibility



A strong internal career centre:

- **Harnesses organizational resources** to adapt to workforce change through pilots, innovation labs, and strategic alignment with business goals.
- **Makes career opportunities visible** through opportunity boards, internal gigs, and digital talent marketplaces.
- **Supports all employees directly** with access to career coaching, mentoring, structured learning pathways, and on-the-job career development experiences.
- **Increases employee agency** by giving everyone clarity and choice in how they grow, while ensuring alignment with organizational needs.
- **Equips managers as talent developers and career enablers**, helping them support, guide, release, and redeploy people rather than “hold on” to them.
- **Integrates HR functions** around a shared skills-based language that connects talent processes across the organization.
- **Clarifies shared responsibility for career development** across employees, managers, and the organization.

These elements make an internal career centre both a strategic workforce lever and a visible commitment to employees’ futures. It’s the infrastructure that enables organizations to anticipate change rather than react to it.

Why is career development core workforce strategy?

Organizations that invest in career development as strategy, not a perk, see measurable results.

Table 1.1. How internal career centres drive business outcomes

Business outcome	Internal career centre impact
Retention ↑	Employees stay longer when they can see internal growth and opportunity.
Agility ↑	Talent redeployment replaces restructuring.
Engagement ↑	Career visibility drives purpose and connection.
Performance ↑	Teams deliver stronger results when people are in roles that fit their skills, strengths, interests, and development trajectory.
Cost ↓	Internal mobility lowers hiring and onboarding costs.
Brand ↑	“We grow our own talent” becomes a market differentiator and employment value proposition.

An internal career centre creates the infrastructure that ensures every strategic shift is backed by a workforce that’s ready, motivated, and capable.



Key insight:

Career development isn’t an HR project. It’s what powers every other workforce initiative, and a shared responsibility between the employee, manager, and organization.

Identifying signs of strain in your organization



The view from HR: Asha connects the dots

Asha starts digging into exit interviews, engagement surveys, and promotion data.

The numbers confirm what her instincts have been telling her: employees aren't always leaving for better pay. They're leaving to find organizations where their next step is clear. Growth opportunities exist inside her company, but they're hidden, scattered across HR initiatives and teams.

What looks like disengagement is really disconnection. Asha realizes she doesn't need another program; she needs a way to connect the ones she already has.

Most organizations facing workforce challenges share similar symptoms:

- **Turnover** in critical roles despite competitive pay.
- **Low mobility** because employees don't know what options exist internally.
- **Manager fatigue** from constant backfilling and onboarding.
- **Mentor fatigue** from repeatedly calling on the same people to support engagement programs.
- **Fragmented programs** in learning, talent, and engagement with little coordination.

When these symptoms appear together, the underlying issue isn't motivation. It's **system design**. Career development does happen, but it's invisible, inconsistent, and unsustainable.

Key insight:

The root problem isn't people leaving; it's the lack of a visible path that makes leaving the logical choice.

The costs of inaction

The consequences of weak internal career systems ripple through every part of the business.

Table 1.2. The ripple effects of weak career systems

Hidden cost	What it looks like	Organizational impact
Turnover and replacement costs	High-potential employees leave after 2–3 years.	Loss of institutional knowledge; recruitment costs rise.
Manager burnout	Constant backfilling and onboarding.	Less time for coaching, innovation, and strategy.
Lost agility	Roles remain vacant or misaligned.	Teams can't pivot to meet market or technology shifts.
Culture erosion	Career growth feels opaque or out of reach.	Trust and engagement decline across the workforce.

An internal career centre addresses these gaps by creating a connected system where learning, opportunity, and employer brand reinforce each other.

Organizations that invest in transparent internal mobility and development pathways don't have to *buy* skills from the market. They *build* them from within.



Key insight:

Internal career visibility is the foundation of retention and resilience.

Checklist: Do you need an internal career centre?

Consider how many of these statements sound familiar in your organization:

- We lose talented employees even after investing in their development.
- Managers aren't sure how to support career development beyond performance reviews.
- Employees can't easily see what roles or opportunities exist internally.
- Our HR programs operate in silos (L&D, mobility, engagement) with limited coordination.
- We track engagement or turnover but not internal mobility or career outcomes.
- Employees either don't take ownership of their career development, or they're left to navigate it alone without meaningful support.
- Our leaders talk about talent strategy without linking it to business results.



If you checked several boxes, your organization likely has many of the right pieces. An internal career centre can connect them into a cohesive system.

Conversation starter:

What workforce pain points are most visible in your organization right now? Which of these issues might be symptoms of a system problem that focusing on career development could solve?



The view from HR: Asha's discovery

While searching for new ways to improve retention, Asha attends an HR conference hoping to find ideas that go beyond surveys and engagement programs.

During a networking break, she meets a career development professional who tells her about internal career centres that help organizations make employee career opportunities and pathways visible and strategic.

The concept surprises her. Until now, she's associated career centres with employment services or campus career offices, not with organizations like her own. Her company has centres of excellence, but they function more as communities of practice than as structural infrastructure.

The idea stays with her. Could this be what her organization has been missing?

REFRAME

Chapter 1



Checklist: Do you need an internal career centre?

You'll gain... A fresh perspective on career development as a driver of business performance.



ARCHITECT

Chapter 2

Map your internal career centre building blocks (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A blueprint for integrating learning, mobility, and mentoring into one ecosystem.

PREPARE

Chapter 4



Checklist: Is your organization ready for an internal career centre?

You'll gain... Clarity on your organization's cultural and structural strengths.

TRANSLATE

Chapter 3

Link your strategy to internal career centre goals (Worksheet)

You'll gain... The ability to link talent development to organizational goals.

BENCHMARK

Chapter 5

Rate your organization's career development maturity (Worksheet)

You'll gain... Insight into where you are today, and what progress looks like.

PERSUADE

Chapter 6

Step-by-step business case framework (Template)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

ACTIVATE

Chapter 7

Plan your pilot lab (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

EVOLVE

Chapter 8

Capture your learning cycle (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A mindset and method for continuous learning and adaptation.

PARTNERSHIP

Conclusion

Join the internal career centre bootcamp

You'll gain... A clear next step to deepen your impact through Challenge Factory partnership.

Chapter 2 | Architect – Design a system for growth

At a glance: Why this chapter matters

- Understand the six core components of an internal career centre.
- See how these elements connect across HR functions to create one cohesive system.
- Learn how to tailor the internal career centre model to your organization's size, goals, and maturity.
- Recognize that an internal career centre represents a new way of working rather than another HR program.

From awareness to design



The view from HR: Asha discovers and learns

Back from the HR conference, Asha can't stop thinking about internal career centres.

The organizational concept is new to her, but it resonates. It sounds like the structured solution her company has been missing. She spends the next few weeks reading articles, watching webinars, and connecting with HR, talent, and career development professionals.

The more she learns, the clearer it becomes: career development is a defined field of practice that gives organizations a competitive edge.

Asha sees an opening. Her company could be ahead of the curve by making career development a visible, strategic part of how work gets done.

In Chapter 1, we explored *why* today’s workforce challenges demand a new approach. Now, we turn to *how* that approach takes shape.

An internal career centre is more than a physical team or department. It’s a system of interconnected practices that help employees navigate opportunity, build skills, and stay engaged—while giving leaders the insight and flexibility they need to redeploy talent quickly as priorities shift.

An internal career centre operates at two levels:

1. **Strategic:** Aligns career development with workforce planning and business strategy.
2. **Operational:** Delivers accessible, everyday career support for employees and managers.

Together, these levels ensure career development is not an event, but an embedded part of how the organization grows.

The 6 core components of an internal career centre

An internal career centre typically brings together six core components. Each component can begin as a small initiative and grow as the organization’s maturity increases. They represent the career development supports that are delivered to employees. They rely on underlying strategy, processes, technology, and communication to be delivered effectively.

Table 2.1. Core components of an internal career centre

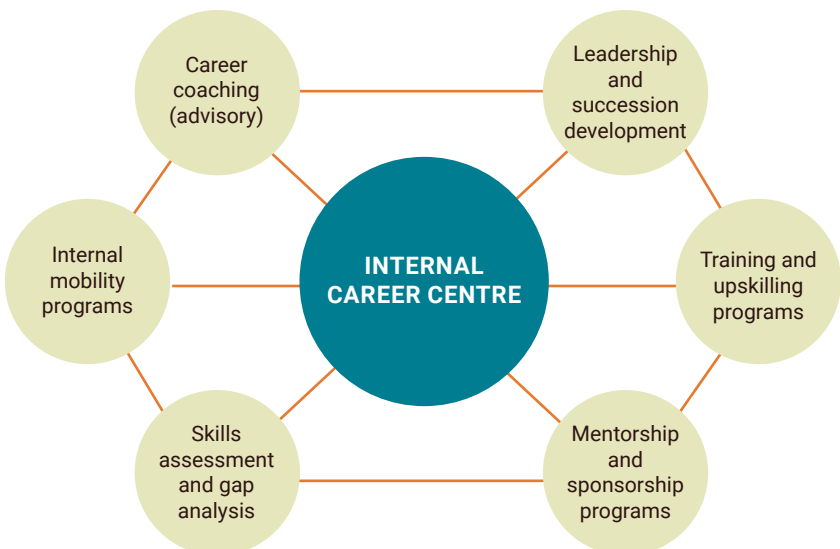
Component	Purpose	Examples and practices
1. Career coaching (advisory)	Equip employees with personalized guidance and self-awareness.	1-on-1 or group coaching, career assessments, goal-setting workshops, internal coach networks
2. Internal mobility programs	Enable movement across teams and roles to build breadth and agility.	Job shadowing, short-term assignments, rotational programs, transparent internal postings
3. Skills assessment and gap analysis	Map current and future skills to inform learning and workforce planning.	Skills inventories, digital skills profiles, role-based capability frameworks, talent intelligence platforms

4. Mentorship and sponsorship programs	Strengthen networks, accelerate equitable advancement, and enable knowledge translation across generations and functions.	Formal, informal, and peer mentoring, intergenerational triads, formal sponsorship for high-potential or underrepresented talent
5. Training and upskilling programs	Build the skills needed for evolving roles and technologies.	Curated learning pathways, micro-credentials, on-the-job projects, collaborative learning labs
6. Leadership and succession development	Prepare leaders to coach, grow, and transition talent effectively.	Emerging-leader programs, succession mapping, readiness pipelines, leadership-as-coach training

Each component brings value on its own, and they are most powerful when they operate together. That integration is what distinguishes an internal career centre from a collection of programs.

How the internal career centre components interconnect

Figure 2.1. How internal career centre components interconnect



When these components operate within a shared framework:

- Employees experience **clarity and agency**, so they can see how to access opportunities and grow.
- Managers gain **tools and confidence** to develop people, not just manage performance.
- Executives gain **insight** into workforce readiness, human capital risks, and internal capability.

This connection depends on shared infrastructure: common skills language, aligned technology, and collaborative governance between HR, business leaders, and employees.



Key insight:

The value of an internal career centre lies in how its parts connect rather than in creating new ones. Most organizations already have the operational ingredients; an internal career centre brings them together.

How an internal career centre integrates into your talent ecosystem

An internal career centre operates across HR functions rather than sitting separate from them. Here's how it typically interacts with core talent functions.

Table 2.2. Internal career centre integration across the talent ecosystem

Talent function	Internal career centre integration point
Learning and development	Connect learning content directly to career pathways, skill gap diagnostics, and learning plans.
Talent acquisition	Prioritize internal candidates and use skills data to source externally only when necessary.
Engagement	Embed quality career conversations into regular check-ins; measure growth, not just frequency or performance.
Diversity, equity, and inclusion	Use transparent mobility processes to create equitable access to opportunity.
Workforce planning and performance management	Link forecasting to internal capability, not just headcount projections.

An internal career centre acts as the infrastructure that aligns these talent functions, ensuring every HR decision supports both employee growth and business adaptability.



The view from HR: Asha starts mapping

Asha gathers her team to unpack everything she’s learned about internal career centres. On a whiteboard, she lists their company’s existing programs: mentoring, stretch assignments, training funds, and internal job postings.

“These are good,” she says, “but they’re not connected.”

One colleague points out that managers rarely know about learning opportunities outside their own departments. Another adds that coaching programs sit in a different budget.

Asha starts drawing lines between the boxes. Slowly, a network takes shape. For the first time, she can see how the pieces could fit together, and how an internal career centre might turn their scattered efforts into one cohesive system.

Activity: Map your internal career centre building blocks

Purpose: Identify which internal career centre components already exist in your organization and where the gaps are.

Step 1: List your existing programs, processes, and teams under the six components. (See Figure 2.1. for the list of components and examples.)

Step 2: Mark each as Starting, Developing, or Advanced.

Step 3: Highlight overlaps or silos.

Step 4: Ask, “If these were connected, what new value would we create?”

This quick mapping reveals your starting point. Most organizations discover they already have many pieces of an internal career centre. They’re just not yet connected or measured as a system.

Conversation starter:

Which of the six components is strongest in your organization today? Which one, if strengthened, would make the greatest difference to employee experience and business agility?

REFRAME

Chapter 1



Checklist: Do you need an internal career centre?

You'll gain... A fresh perspective on career development as a driver of business performance.

ARCHITECT

Chapter 2

Map your internal career centre building blocks (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A blueprint for integrating learning, mobility, and mentoring into one ecosystem.

PREPARE

Chapter 4



Checklist: Is your organization ready for an internal career centre?

You'll gain... Clarity on your organization's cultural and structural strengths.

TRANSLATE

Chapter 3



Link your strategy to internal career centre goals (Worksheet)

You'll gain... The ability to link talent development to organizational goals.

BENCHMARK

Chapter 5

Rate your organization's career development maturity (Worksheet)

You'll gain... Insight into where you are today, and what progress looks like.

PERSUADE

Chapter 6

Step-by-step business case framework (Template)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

ACTIVATE

Chapter 7

Plan your pilot lab (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

EVOLVE

Chapter 8

Capture your learning cycle (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A mindset and method for continuous learning and adaptation.

PARTNERSHIP

Conclusion

Join the internal career centre bootcamp

You'll gain... A clear next step to deepen your impact through Challenge Factory partnership.

Chapter 3 | Translate – Connect people growth to business strategy

At a glance: Why this chapter matters

- Connect the purpose of your internal career centre to your organization's overall business strategy.
- Learn how to translate career development outcomes into the metrics that matter to leaders.
- Discover how to use ROI and workforce data to build a compelling strategic case.
- Begin positioning career development as a driver of growth, agility, and reduced risk.

From model to mission



The view from HR: Asha pitches her idea

Asha finds a gap in her CHRO's schedule, fifteen minutes between leadership meetings. Alexander is practical, always pressed for time, and focused on results.

She arrives with a one-page summary linking career development to the company's top priorities: digital transformation, market expansion, and leadership succession.

"If we connect these goals to internal career growth," she says, "we can strengthen retention and agility without adding new programs."

Alexander scans the page. "You're saying this would save money and help us move talent faster?"

"Yes," Asha replies. "It's a structural fix, not a new initiative."

He nods slowly. "It's interesting. But I'll need to see numbers for turn-over costs, internal fill rates, that sort of thing."

Asha leaves energized. She finally understands the language that can move the idea forward.

You've seen how an internal career centre operates as an integrated system for career growth. The next step is to connect it directly to an organization's mission, priorities, and success measures.

This alignment is what turns an internal career centre from a *good HR idea* into a strategic advantage. When the internal career centre is tied to business goals, it becomes part of how the organization competes and evolves.

Career development is about achieving business outcomes through people.

Linking internal career centres to organizational goals

Every internal career centre should begin with a clear line of sight between business priorities and career development outcomes. This alignment helps leaders understand not only what you're doing, but why it matters.

Table 3.1. Translating business priorities to internal career centre impact

Business priority	Internal career centre contribution	Strategic impact
Retention and engagement	Visible internal mobility, career coaching, manager capability	Reduced turnover and stronger culture
Innovation and agility	Upskilling, cross-functional assignments, internal gigs	Faster response to market or technology changes
Leadership pipeline	Mentorship, sponsorship, and succession readiness	Sustainable growth and resilience
Operational efficiency	Internal redeployment over external hiring	Lower recruitment costs and shorter vacancy times
Brand and reputation	Demonstrated investment in employee growth and satisfaction	Competitive advantage in attracting top talent



Key insight:

An internal career centre connects people strategy to business strategy, and measures both.

Using ROI and metrics to tell the story

Building the business case for an internal career centre requires linking workforce data to outcomes leaders already track. Numbers confirm what employees experience every day, giving evidence to the story that data alone can't tell. Here are examples of quantitative and qualitative indicators that reinforce the value of an internal career centre.

Table 3.2. Quantitative and qualitative indicators of an internal career centre's success

Metric type	Examples	Insight provided
Quantitative (Hard data)	Retention rates, internal fill rate, cost per hire, engagement scores, participation in development programs.	Shows efficiency, savings, and performance outcomes.
Qualitative (Human data)	Employee feedback, success stories, career progression examples, coaching testimonials.	Demonstrates trust, culture, and behavioural change.

The most compelling ROI narratives combine both quantitative and qualitative data. Leaders rely on data to decide, yet stories are what they remember.

The cost of turnover vs people development

Replacing a skilled employee costs more than most leaders realize, anywhere between 40–200% of their annual salary when you factor in lost productivity, recruitment, onboarding, and ramp-up time ([Gallup 2024](#)).

Investing in structured people development through an internal career centre costs far less and delivers a faster return through stronger retention and engagement.

Even a small reduction in turnover can produce measurable ROI within the first year:

- If your organization loses 25 mid-level employees per year at an average cost of \$100,000 each, turnover could cost roughly \$3.75–\$5 million annually.
- A modest 10% improvement in retention achieved through visible career pathways could save \$375,000–\$500,000 per year, while building capability and morale.

The 3 dimensions of ROI

A strong internal career centre demonstrates returns beyond cost savings.

Table 3.3. Dimensions of an internal career centre's ROI

ROI dimension	How it's measured	Why it matters
Financial	Turnover reduction, internal fill rate, cost per hire, productivity gains.	Shows efficiency and direct financial return.
Strategic	Leadership readiness, agility index, innovation participation, succession health.	Demonstrates alignment with long-term business goals and adaptability.
Cultural	Engagement and trust scores, employee career confidence, development participation.	Reflects how employees experience growth and opportunity; key to sustainability.



Key insight:

The most credible ROI cases combine all three dimensions (financial, strategic, and cultural) to tell a complete story of value.

Activity: Link your strategy to internal career centre goals

Purpose: Connect your organization's business priorities to the outcomes your internal career centre can deliver.

Step 1: List your top three strategic goals (from existing business plans or executive dashboards).

Step 2: Identify how career development can support each goal. Note how hard or easy this is to do.

Step 3: Outline metrics (quantitative and qualitative) that would show progress.

Step 4: Share your draft with at least one business leader and refine it based on their perspective.

This exercise bridges the expertise and language gaps between HR and business leaders, positioning your internal career centre as core infrastructure that enables strategic goals rather than adding extra work.



The view from HR: Asha gains traction

A month later, Asha presents her refined framework at a leadership meeting. Alexander, sitting near the CEO, keeps his eyes on the slides as she walks through retention savings, readiness for digital transformation, and leadership continuity.

When the CFO leans forward and asks, “So what’s the ROI?” Alexander steps in.

“We’ve run the math,” he says. “Even a 10% reduction in turnover offsets the cost of building this structure. It’s not a program spend. It’s a business investment.”

The tone in the room changes. The CFO’s questions move from budgets to timelines.

After the meeting, Alexander gives Asha a brief nod. “Good work,” he says. “You spoke their language. Now let’s see if we can make it real.”

Conversation starter:

How does your organization currently define workforce success? What would need to change for career development outcomes to count as part of that definition?

REFRAME

Chapter 1



Checklist: Do you need an internal career centre?

You'll gain... A fresh perspective on career development as a driver of business performance.

ARCHITECT

Chapter 2

Map your internal career centre building blocks (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A blueprint for integrating learning, mobility, and mentoring into one ecosystem.

PREPARE

Chapter 4



Checklist: Is your organization ready for an internal career centre?

You'll gain... Clarity on your organization's cultural and structural strengths.



TRANSLATE

Chapter 3

Link your strategy to internal career centre goals (Worksheet)

You'll gain... The ability to link talent development to organizational goals.

BENCHMARK

Chapter 5

Rate your organization's career development maturity (Worksheet)

You'll gain... Insight into where you are today, and what progress looks like.

PERSUADE

Chapter 6

Step-by-step business case framework (Template)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

ACTIVATE

Chapter 7

Plan your pilot lab (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

EVOLVE

Chapter 8

Capture your learning cycle (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A mindset and method for continuous learning and adaptation.

PARTNERSHIP

Conclusion

Join the internal career centre bootcamp

You'll gain... A clear next step to deepen your impact through Challenge Factory partnership.

Chapter 4 | Prepare – Assess your readiness for change

At a glance: Why this chapter matters

- Identify organizational and cultural preconditions for success.
- Evaluate whether your leaders, managers, and systems are ready to support change.
- Recognize the risks that can derail implementation—and the enablers that build momentum.
- Clarify where to begin and what gaps need addressing before moving to design or launch.

Preconditions for internal career centre success



The view from HR: Asha tests the waters

Fresh off her presentation to the leadership team, Asha feels the tide turning. The CHRO, Alexander, has asked her to explore what it would take to make an internal career centre real.

She starts by interviewing department heads and managers. “What gets in the way of developing people here?” she asks.

The answers are revealing. Some mention time pressure. Others say they don’t know what opportunities exist beyond their teams. A few are candid: “We’d love to promote more internally, but we don’t have a way of knowing who else, beyond our current teams, might have the right skills or experience.”

Asha realizes the challenge isn’t enthusiasm; it’s alignment. The pieces are there, but the organization needs shared language, data, and accountability to connect them.

She begins mapping readiness not as a checklist of what’s missing, but as an honest picture of what’s possible.

Before establishing an internal career centre, an organization needs firm foundations in culture, leadership, data, and systems that genuinely support career development.

True readiness is measured less by resources than by mindset, including how willing the organization is to act with transparency, encourage collaboration, and share responsibility for development.

Figure 4.1. Four preconditions for internal career centre success



Four preconditions set the stage for success:

1. Shared belief in internal growth

Employees and leaders must see internal mobility as a strength, not a risk.

- Ask: Do we celebrate internal moves as much as external hires?
- Look for: Policies, stories, and metrics that reward developing from within.

2. Psychological safety and trust

Career conversations only work when employees trust that speaking about growth won't jeopardize their current role.

- Ask: Do managers feel equipped to discuss current and future roles without fear of losing talent?
- Look for: Consistent messaging from leaders that internal growth and mobility are valued.

3. Visible leadership support

Endorsement from senior leaders signals that career development is strategic, not optional.

- Ask: Do executives link career development to business outcomes?
- Look for: Leader participation in mentoring, town halls, or recognition of internal mobility.

4. Clear connection between career development and business priorities

When career growth advances strategic goals, it earns sustained attention.

- Ask: How does career development support our core objectives (e.g., digital transformation, market expansion)?
- Look for: Evidence in planning cycles, performance metrics, or workforce dashboards.

If these conditions are weak or inconsistent, start with conversation and small pilot initiatives to build credibility. An internal career centre cannot succeed in a culture that rewards talent hoarding or views career conversations as side projects.

Key insight:

An internal career centre thrives when career development is not a new initiative but a natural next step in how the organization already operates.

Who's responsible for an internal career centre?

An internal career centre relies on shared leadership, with clear accountability at every level working in concert.

Leaders set the tone by integrating career development into strategy and performance measures.

Managers make it real through everyday coaching and career conversations.

HR and talent teams provide the infrastructure, data, and analytical insights that keep the system connected.

Table 4.1. summarizes how these responsibilities come together in practice.

Table 4.1. Role readiness for an internal career centre

Area	What to look for	Why it matters
Executive sponsorship	Visible, consistent advocacy from at least one senior leader (often the CHRO, COO, or CEO).	Sustains momentum and funding beyond HR's scope.
Governance	Defined accountability for career development decisions and outcomes.	Prevents the internal career centre from becoming "everyone's job" and therefore no one's.

Manager capability	Comfort with coaching, feedback, and career conversations.	Front-line managers are the linchpin; if they're not enabled, systems fail.
Cross-functional collaboration	Partnerships between HR, IT, L&D, DEI, and workforce planning.	Ensures that career development is woven through all people systems.
Data and technology	Reliable data on skills, mobility, and engagement; integrated platforms where possible.	Enables insight-driven decisions instead of guesswork.

Leadership sets the vision, governance defines the structure, and managers turn intent into action. Together, they create the conditions an internal career centre needs to take root.

Risks and enablers to watch for

Every organization begins this journey with strengths and vulnerabilities. Recognizing both early allows you to plan realistically and build momentum.

Common risks

- **Manager resistance:** Managers fear losing top performers or lack time and resources for development conversations.
- **Fragmented systems:** Learning, mobility, and performance data live in separate platforms, creating blind spots.
- **Legacy patterns and historical blind spots:** Past decisions, structures, or cultural norms can shape how people experience mobility and development, even if no one names them explicitly.
- **Cultural inertia:** Employees are used to waiting for direction rather than owning their career development, often accompanied by a focus on funding or resource scarcity.
- **Short-termism:** Leadership focus on immediate deliverables overshadows long-term capability building.
- **Undefined ownership:** No clear sponsor accountable for career development outcomes.

Key enablers

- **Visible quick wins:** Early pilots or career conversation campaigns that demonstrate value.

- **Peer champions:** Influential managers or employees who model new behaviours.
- **Transparent communication:** Consistent messaging that reframes career development as shared responsibility.
- **Insight into organizational history:** Understanding how earlier practices created today's talent systems help teams design change that is realistic, respectful of context, and more likely to take root.
- **Aligned metrics:** Tracking internal mobility, retention, and readiness alongside financial KPIs.
- **External partnerships:** Engagement with career development professionals, postsecondary institutions, or industry associations.

These risks and enablers should guide your implementation roadmap. You don't need to eliminate every barrier before beginning. Instead, identify which ones to mitigate first and where momentum already exists.

Checklist: Is your organization ready for an internal career centre?

Check all that apply:

- Leaders consistently link career development to strategy and performance outcomes.
- Managers feel confident having career conversations and supporting talent mobility internally.
- Employees can identify visible career pathways and mobility opportunities.
- HR systems share a common skills language and data foundation.
- Governance and accountability for career development are clearly defined.
- The culture values internal growth as much as external recruitment.
- Career development is discussed in leadership and planning meetings.
- There is openness to piloting new approaches and learning through experimentation.

If you checked most of these boxes, your organization is likely ready to move toward maturity assessment and business case development.

If several remain unchecked, view them as a roadmap for readiness building rather than a reason to postpone action.



The view from HR: Asha identifies cultural barriers

During her readiness assessment, Asha notices something subtle.

When managers talk about “developing people,” they often mean preparing them to leave their team. Growth carries a sense of loss.

She organizes a session where three managers share success stories about internal moves that strengthened their departments rather than weakening them. The conversation shifts.

By the end of the session, one manager says, “Maybe the real question isn’t how to keep my people, but how to keep them growing.”

Asha smiles. The culture is starting to turn.

Conversation starter:

What attitudes, systems, or habits in your organization might unintentionally block career growth? What small, visible changes could begin to shift those norms?

REFRAME

Chapter 1



Checklist: Do you need an internal career centre?

You'll gain... A fresh perspective on career development as a driver of business performance.

ARCHITECT

Chapter 2

Map your internal career centre building blocks (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A blueprint for integrating learning, mobility, and mentoring into one ecosystem.

PREPARE

Chapter 4



Checklist: Is your organization ready for an internal career centre?

You'll gain... Clarity on your organization's cultural and structural strengths.

TRANSLATE

Chapter 3

Link your strategy to internal career centre goals (Worksheet)

You'll gain... The ability to link talent development to organizational goals.

YOU ARE HERE

BENCHMARK

Chapter 5

Rate your organization's career development maturity (Worksheet)

You'll gain... Insight into where you are today, and what progress looks like.

PERSUADE

Chapter 6

Step-by-step business case framework (Template)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

ACTIVATE

Chapter 7

Plan your pilot lab (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

EVOLVE

Chapter 8

Capture your learning cycle (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A mindset and method for continuous learning and adaptation.

PARTNERSHIP

Conclusion

Join the internal career centre bootcamp

You'll gain... A clear next step to deepen your impact through Challenge Factory partnership.

Chapter 5 | Benchmark – Evaluate your career development maturity

At a glance: Why this chapter matters

- Understand how the Career Development Maturity Matrix™ helps organizations assess progress and set priorities.
- Learn the four dimensions (Quality, Capacity, Cohesion, and Access) that define maturity in career development practice.
- Identify what Starting, Developing, and Advanced maturity levels look like in action.
- Use the Matrix to benchmark your organization's current state and chart a realistic path forward.

The Career Development Maturity Matrix™

The view from HR: Asha's team benchmarks their current state



Asha gathers her HR and learning colleagues around a conference table covered with sticky notes. Each note lists a current initiative: mentoring programs, job rotations, digital learning platforms, performance reviews.

She asks one question: “How strong are we in each of these areas?”

The room falls quiet. Someone asks, “How do we know what strong looks like?”

That's when Asha introduces Challenge Factory's Career Development Maturity Matrix™, a tool to help organizations assess how intentionally and systemically they integrate career development across the enterprise.

As they work through the Maturity Matrix together, the discussion becomes lively. People begin to see patterns and gaps. Their learning culture is strong, but data on skills and mobility is patchy. Managers care deeply, but they lack time and tools.

By the end of the session, the team realizes maturity isn't about perfection; it's about alignment, consistency, and progress over time.

Every organization's approach to career development sits somewhere along a maturity continuum. Challenge Factory's [Career Development Maturity Matrix™](#) helps you locate that position and identify the next step forward.¹

Figure 5.1. Core dimensions of the Career Development Maturity Matrix™



It assesses four core dimensions that together define how deeply career development is embedded in the organization's systems and culture:

1. **Quality** – How consistently career development practices meet professional standards and deliver meaningful outcomes.
2. **Capacity** – The depth of skills, tools, and resources available to sustain and expand those practices.
3. **Cohesion** – The degree of coordination, shared understanding, and alignment across HR, leadership, and business functions.
4. **Access** – The extent to which career development opportunities are equitable and visible to all employees.

The Maturity Matrix provides a structured way to reflect on questions such as:

- How consistent and intentional are our career development activities?
- Who has access to support, and who might be left out?
- Are we building the internal capability needed to sustain career growth?
- How well do our programs connect and reinforce one another?

Key insight:

Maturity isn't a finish line. It's a continuous cycle of alignment, implementation, evaluation, and improvement.

¹ Every organization's approach to career development sits somewhere along a maturity continuum. Challenge Factory's Career Development Maturity Matrix™ helps you locate that position and identify the next step forward.

Maturity indicators by HR practice area

Use this table to explore how each dimension shows up across core HR functions. These examples help teams translate maturity concepts into observable practices and data.

Table 5.1. Career development maturity indicators by HR practice area

HR practice area	Quality indicators	Capacity indicators	Cohesion indicators	Access indicators
Talent mobility	% of open roles filled internally; clarity of career pathways.	Structured mobility programs (rotations, stretch assignments).	Leadership endorsement and consistency of internal moves.	Transparent internal job posting and mobility marketplace.
Learning and development	% of employees with personalized development plans linked to pathways.	Breadth of offerings (formal, experiential, peer learning).	Mentoring and peer networks that support equitable access.	Participation rates across levels and demographics.
Engagement	Alignment of employee interests, strengths, and business goals.	Manager capacity to assign work tasks based on employee interests, strengths, and business goals.	Frequency and quality of career conversations.	Employee satisfaction and engagement with career opportunities.
Succession planning	Strength of pipelines and readiness for key roles.	Coverage beyond executives; inclusion of emerging skills.	Diversity and equity of succession pools and promotion outcomes.	Employee awareness of internal career tracks and advancement stories.
Technology	Integration of career development tools, resources, and services into HR platforms.	Adoption of learning, talent, or mobility tools that scale development.	Universal employee access to systems supporting development.	Ease of navigating career tools, resources, and platforms.

Analytics and reporting	Tracking of workforce forecasting and alignment with skill needs.	Data collection on program participation and career outcomes.	Insights shared across teams to drive collaboration and accountability.	Monitoring of engagement, access, and demand signals for development programs.
Career support services	Availability and quality of coaching, mentoring, and guidance programs.	Resources and staffing that enable enterprise-wide support.	Integration of services with other HR functions and leadership initiatives.	Visibility and accessibility of career services for all employees.

Making sense of maturity levels

The Maturity Matrix uses three progressive levels (starting, developing, and advanced) to describe how career development evolves from isolated practice to systemic capability.

Movement between levels doesn't happen through large leaps. It's the result of small, deliberate improvements, including standardizing processes, clarifying accountability, aligning data systems, and expanding access.

Table 5.2. Career development maturity levels by dimension

Maturity Matrix dimension	Starting maturity	Developing maturity	Advanced maturity
Quality	Career development occurs informally and inconsistently. Success depends on individual initiative.	Some standards and tools exist; evaluation happens periodically. Practice varies by department or leader.	Practices are grounded in professional standards, regularly measured, and continuously improved.
Capacity	A few champions drive activity with limited resources.	Dedicated staff and technology exist but capability remains uneven across departments.	Career development is institutionally resourced with skilled practitioners and sustainable systems.

Cohesion	Programs operate in silos with little coordination.	HR functions begin sharing information and collaborating on design.	Career development is the connective tissue linking talent, learning, and business planning.
Access	Opportunities depend on personal networks or manager support.	Some structure promotes access, but visibility and equity vary.	Opportunities are transparent, inclusive, and accessible to all employees.

This table reflects how organizations typically progress from fragmented or informal practice to coordinated, strategic systems that make career development part of everyday operations.

An internal career centre acts as both the mechanism and the measurement system for this evolution. It provides the infrastructure for organizations to track progress and maintain focus as priorities shift.

Key insight:

Starting organizations recognize the value of career development but approach it as a set of initiatives rather than a strategic system.

Developing organizations have clearer ownership, leadership support, and growing consistency.

Advanced organizations embed career development into their operating model, funding, and performance measures.

Activity: Rate your organization’s career development maturity

Purpose: To identify your organization’s current level of maturity and highlight areas for growth across the four dimensions.

This activity works best as a collaborative exercise with representation from HR, leadership, and management teams. The goal isn’t to assign a score. It’s to spark shared understanding and commitment to improvement.

Step 1: Review the four dimensions: Quality, Capacity, Cohesion, and Access.

Step 2: For each dimension, determine whether your organization aligns most closely with the Starting, Developing, or Advanced description. Consult

the tables in Appendix A for examples and indicators of maturity by HR practice area.

Step 3: Discuss what evidence supports your rating. Look for tangible examples such as metrics, policies, or employee feedback.

Step 4: Identify one priority action per dimension that could move your organization to the next level.

Use the worksheet below as a facilitation tool for team discussion.

Maturity Matrix dimension	Our current level (circle one)	Evidence	Next step / Priority action
Quality	Starting / Developing / Advanced		
Capacity	Starting / Developing / Advanced		
Cohesion	Starting / Developing / Advanced		
Access	Starting / Developing / Advanced		

Conversation starter:

Which of the four dimensions (Quality, Capacity, Cohesion, or Access) represents your organization's greatest strength? Which one, if improved, would most enhance employee experience and internal mobility?

REFRAME

Chapter 1



Checklist: Do you need an internal career centre?

You'll gain... A fresh perspective on career development as a driver of business performance.

ARCHITECT

Chapter 2

Map your internal career centre building blocks (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A blueprint for integrating learning, mobility, and mentoring into one ecosystem.

PREPARE

Chapter 4



Checklist: Is your organization ready for an internal career centre?

You'll gain... Clarity on your organization's cultural and structural strengths.

TRANSLATE

Chapter 3

Link your strategy to internal career centre goals (Worksheet)

You'll gain... The ability to link talent development to organizational goals.

BENCHMARK

Chapter 5



Rate your organization's career development maturity (Worksheet)

You'll gain... Insight into where you are today, and what progress looks like.

PERSUADE

Chapter 6

Step-by-step business case framework (Template)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

ACTIVATE

Chapter 7

Plan your pilot lab (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

EVOLVE

Chapter 8

Capture your learning cycle (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A mindset and method for continuous learning and adaptation.

PARTNERSHIP

Conclusion

Join the internal career centre bootcamp

You'll gain... A clear next step to deepen your impact through Challenge Factory partnership.

Chapter 6 | Persuade – Make the business case for investment and support

At a glance: Why this chapter matters

- Understand how a strong business case turns intent into investment and momentum.
- Learn the essential components of a compelling internal career centre proposal.
- Follow a practical, step-by-step framework that links purpose, value, and measurable outcomes.
- Tailor your case for executives, HR teams, managers, and employees.
- Use the interest holder messaging cheat sheet to refine communication and build buy-in.²

The Career Development Maturity Matrix™

The view from HR: Asha and Alexander present their case



Asha and Alexander sit in the boardroom waiting for the senior leadership team to arrive. Between them is a clear, data-backed, and designed five-page proposal to answer every question they expect from the CFO, COO, and CEO.

Asha has learned from experience: good ideas don't sell themselves. They need evidence, relevance, and a clear link to the organization's strategy. And Alexander, knowing the CEO likes time to reflect, has already discussed the proposal with him informally.

As Asha presents, she starts with the big picture: "Our turnover in key roles is up 18%. Internal hiring is down. This model shows how a career

² Challenge Factory uses the term *interest holder* rather than *stakeholder*, a term with colonial roots tied to land ownership and exclusion. We believe *interest holder* creates space and recognition for the diverse individuals and groups that have a vested interest in the outcomes of a project or initiative, while emphasizing inclusion, shared responsibility, and the value of every voice in shaping impact.

development centre of expertise could reverse those trends in less than a year.”

She walks through each section of the business case: the opportunity, strategic fit, financial return, and pilot plan. When the CFO asks about cost, Alexander steps in. “We’re not proposing another HR program,” he explains. “We’re investing in infrastructure that connects people and performance.”

By the end of the meeting, curiosity and skepticism have given way to commitment. The CEO sums it up: “You’ve linked this to our business strategy, not just engagement. You’ve got approval to start with the pilot.”

A strong business case transforms a good idea into an organizational priority. It provides leaders with confidence that the initiative is not only meaningful but measurable.

For an internal career centre, a business case does more than justify funding. It also builds credibility, defines success, and secures shared ownership across functions.

Without a structured case, career development can be seen as a “nice-to-have.” With one, it becomes a strategic necessity tied to retention, agility, and productivity.

Key questions your business case should answer:

- How does an internal career centre advance the organization’s strategy and solve current workforce challenges?
- What is the return on investment (financial, strategic, and cultural)?
- What are the short-term wins and long-term payoffs?
- Who will lead, govern, and measure success?



Key insight:

A well-structured business case does more than secure approval—it aligns leaders, managers, and employees around a shared investment in career development.

Your business case roadmap

The following three sections work together to guide the creation and communication of your internal career centre's business case.

The **core elements** table outlines what to include in a strong proposal, the **step-by-step framework** shows how to build and present it effectively, and the **interest holder messaging cheat sheet** helps you tailor your message to different audiences.

Review all three to ensure your business case is complete, persuasive, and ready for executive decision-making.



Core elements of a strong internal career centre business case

The following table outlines the essential components of a compelling internal career centre business case. Each element builds the structure for a clear, credible proposal that connects purpose, strategy, and measurable outcomes. For a full business case template, see Appendix B.

Table 6.1. Core elements of the internal career centre business case

Element	Purpose	Example
Purpose and opportunity	Define what problem the internal career centre will solve and why it matters now.	Increasing internal mobility and retention to support digital transformation.
Strategic context	Show clear alignment to organizational goals and workforce strategy.	Link internal career centre outcomes to growth, efficiency, or innovation objectives.
Value proposition	Describe the tangible and intangible benefits the internal career centre will deliver to the organization and its people.	Improved retention, engagement, and agility through better career visibility.
ROI and success metrics	Quantify the expected outcomes and define how success will be measured.	Target 10% increase in internal hires and 5% drop in turnover within 12 months.

Proposed model	Describe the core components, structure, and governance of the internal career centre.	Pilot hub combining coaching, mobility, and learning pathways.
Risks and mitigation	Anticipate barriers and show how they will be addressed.	Manager resistance mitigated through sponsorship and communication.
Phased implementation plan	Present a clear path from pilot to enterprise scale.	Start with one business unit; measure impact and expand.
Investment summary	Outline resources, technology, and program costs alongside projected savings.	Net savings projected by Year 2 through reduced recruitment costs.
Decision request	Specify the approval, endorsement, or investment being sought to proceed.	Approval to launch six-month pilot and assign executive sponsor.

Activity: Step-by-step business case framework

This framework provides a practical sequence for developing your internal career centre’s business case, from defining purpose to securing approval. Use it to organize your thinking, align interest holders, and build momentum toward implementation. For a full business case template, see Appendix B.

Table 6.2. Step-by-step business case framework



Step 1 Define the purpose and scope

What to do

Clarify the challenge your internal career centre will address and the outcomes you aim to achieve.

Outcome

A clear, concise problem statement that resonates with leaders.

Step 2

Connect to strategy

What to do

Link career development outcomes to organizational goals and workforce strategy.

Outcome

Demonstrates alignment and strategic relevance.

Step 3

Quantify and communicate value

What to do

Estimate ROI and articulate both quantitative and qualitative benefits.

Outcome

Builds credibility and illustrates total value creation.

Step 4

Describe the model

What to do

Outline the design, governance, and pilot plan for the internal career centre.

Outcome

Shows structure, feasibility, and scalability.

Step 5

Address risks and enablers

What to do

Identify barriers and describe mitigation and support strategies.

Outcome

Builds trust and signals readiness for implementation.

Step 6

Plan the phases

What to do

Show how the internal career centre will grow from pilot to full enterprise integration.

Outcome

Highlights scalability and long-term vision.

Step 7

Summarize investment needs

What to do

Present high-level costs, required resources, and projected savings.

Outcome

Demonstrates fiscal accountability and return potential.

Step 8

Define success metrics

What to do

Identify how impact and progress will be measured over time.

Outcome

Clarifies expectations and supports continuous improvement.

Step 9

Call to action

What to do

Clearly state what decision or commitment you are seeking from leadership.

Outcome

Provides a confident, actionable close to your proposal.

Tailoring your case for different audiences

Different audiences hear the same business case through very different lenses. Understanding these patterns is essential for shaping a case that resonates and builds alignment.

What follows reflects Challenge Factory's direct experience consulting with organizations across sectors. These insights come from years of seeing how business cases succeed, or stall, depending on how well they speak to what each group values most.

- **Executives (CEO, CFO, COO):** Focus on risk reduction, cost efficiency, and agility. Use short data-driven statements and project clear ROI.
- **HR and talent leaders:** Highlight integration benefits, (e.g., how the internal career centre breaks silos and enhances measurement across functions).

- **Managers:** Emphasize how it makes their jobs easier (e.g., faster backfills, stronger teams, and recognition for developing people).
- **Employees:** Communicate fairness, visibility, and opportunity. Show how career development becomes a shared responsibility and cultural norm.

Table 6.3. Interest holder messaging cheat sheet

Audience	What they care about	Key message	Proof point or example
Executives (CEO, CFO)	ROI, agility, talent pipeline health.	An internal career centre reduces costs, accelerates readiness, and builds resilience.	Projected cost savings from turnover reduction.
HR and talent leaders	Integration and strategic impact.	An internal career centre unites HR programs and elevates career development from activity to strategy.	Cross-functional metrics dashboard.
Managers	Retention, backfill speed, team strength.	Supporting career growth strengthens teams and reduces disruption.	Pilot data on improved internal mobility rates.
Employees	Fairness, visibility, growth.	Your next opportunity is here—career development is transparent and supported.	Internal career hub or marketplace success stories.



Conversation starter:

What data, stories, or early wins could you use to demonstrate the value of career development to your leadership team?

REFRAME

Chapter 1



Checklist: Do you need an internal career centre?

You'll gain... A fresh perspective on career development as a driver of business performance.

ARCHITECT

Chapter 2

Map your internal career centre building blocks (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A blueprint for integrating learning, mobility, and mentoring into one ecosystem.

PREPARE

Chapter 4



Checklist: Is your organization ready for an internal career centre?

You'll gain... Clarity on your organization's cultural and structural strengths.

TRANSLATE

Chapter 3

Link your strategy to internal career centre goals (Worksheet)

You'll gain... The ability to link talent development to organizational goals.

BENCHMARK

Chapter 5

Rate your organization's career development maturity (Worksheet)

You'll gain... Insight into where you are today, and what progress looks like.

PERSUADE

Chapter 6

Step-by-step business case framework (Template)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

ACTIVATE

Chapter 7

Plan your pilot lab (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.



EVOLVE

Chapter 8

Capture your learning cycle (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A mindset and method for continuous learning and adaptation.

PARTNERSHIP

Conclusion

Join the internal career centre bootcamp

You'll gain... A clear next step to deepen your impact through Challenge Factory partnership.

Chapter 7 | Activate – Turn strategy into practice

At a glance: Why this chapter matters

- Learn how to move from concept to action through pilots, communication, and learning cycles.
- See how small, visible wins build confidence and culture change.
- Apply Challenge Factory’s Research-to-Practice cycle to test, refine, and scale your internal career centre.
- Understand that implementation isn’t about perfection. It’s about progress, evidence, and engagement.

The internal career centre Research-to-Practice cycle



The view from HR: Asha launches the pilot

After months of preparation, data collection, and storytelling, Asha is ready to turn the internal career centre proposal into a pilot. She brings together a cross-functional team, her company’s established approach for tackling major initiatives collaboratively.

They decide to begin with one department: Marketing, where turnover and reskilling pressures are highest. The pilot will test three components: career coaching, a triad mentorship program, and open access to all job postings.

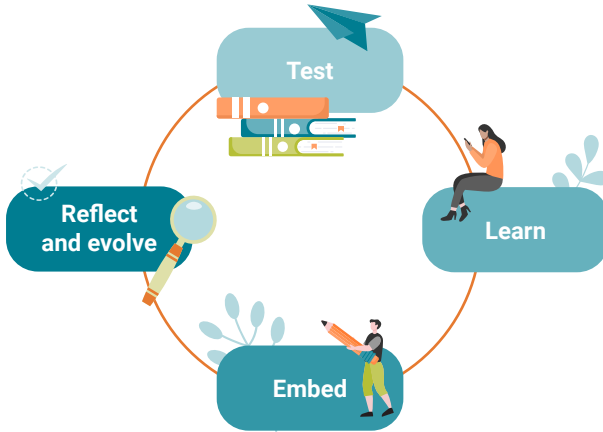
In the kickoff meeting, Asha reminds the team that this isn’t about launching another HR initiative. “We’re running a learning lab,” she said. “Our goal isn’t to get it perfect. It’s to get it real.”

Alexander nods. “That’s how we’ll build evidence for scale. Think of this as our Research-to-Practice cycle in action.”

The group agrees: measure what matters, communicate often, and share stories as they go.

Implementing an internal career centre is a journey of learning in motion. Challenge Factory’s Research-to-Practice methodology provides a structured yet adaptive way to turn insight into embedded capability. It operates through four continuous stages.

Figure 7.1. The internal career centre Research-to-Practice cycle



STAGE	PURPOSE	KEY ACTIVITIES
1. Test	Pilot the model in a controlled environment.	Select a business unit, define 2–3 measurable goals, collect baseline data.
2. Learn	Gather insights and feedback from employees, managers, and leaders.	Track outcomes, capture stories, identify barriers and enablers.
3. Embed	Integrate proven practices into enterprise systems and culture.	Refine processes, scale what works, align policies and performance measures.
4. Reflect and evolve	Revisit outcomes, adapt to new context, and plan the next iteration.	What needs to change next?

This cycle reinforces that implementation is experimentation. Each iteration strengthens organizational learning, creates internal champions, and builds confidence to scale.



Key insight:

Sustainable internal career centres evolve through reflection and adaptation, long after implementation begins.

While the Research-to-Practice cycle includes four distinct stages, organizations rarely experience them as completely separate. The three phases below translate the cycle into a practical implementation sequence, showing how testing, learning, embedding, and reflection unfold over time.

Phase 1: Pilot and proof

Launching a pilot begins by defining what success looks like in observable behaviour and measurable outcomes, not abstract goals.

Start small and visible. Choose one function or region with both need and leadership support. Frame the pilot as an organizational learning experiment rather than a traditional HR project.

Focus on three early priorities:

1. **Visibility:** Make career opportunities transparent through postings, gigs, or skill-based projects.
2. **Access:** Offer employees direct support (career coaching, mentoring, or short-term assignments).
3. **Communication:** Share stories early and often to normalize movement and growth.

Even modest pilots can demonstrate tangible returns. A department that reduces voluntary turnover by a few key roles or fills 30% more jobs internally provides the kind of evidence executives remember.



Key insight:

Early proof is more powerful than scale. Pilots that generate credible data and human stories create momentum far faster than large-scale rollouts.

Phase 2: Learn and adapt

Once the pilot is underway, structured reflection is essential. This is where the practice part of Research-to-Practice comes alive.

Gather both data and narrative:

- Quantitative metrics: internal fill rate, participation levels, coaching outcomes, or engagement shifts.
- Qualitative stories: employee testimonials, manager reflections, lessons learned.

Invite participants to share about what worked and what surprised them.

Asha's team, for example, discovered that employees valued "career conversations with peers" as much as formal coaching. That insight reshaped the design of their mentoring triads.

Hold short learning sprints, such as 30-minute debriefs every few weeks, to capture insight before it's lost in busy day-to-day work. These sessions build transparency, trust, and a habit of real-time learning.

Phase 3: Embed and scale

Embedding begins when successful pilot practices are translated into policy, technology, and performance systems. This doesn't mean creating bureaucracy. It means making what worked repeatable.

1. **Align systems:** Integrate internal mobility metrics into HR dashboards and workforce planning.
2. **Equip managers:** Train managers to hold consistent career conversations and recognize internal movement as a leadership success.
3. **Build governance:** Define who owns ongoing measurement, communication, and scaling decisions.
4. **Establish an operating rhythm:** Put in place regular reviews that connect data, feedback, and decision-making across career development practices, allowing the system to adapt as business and workforce needs evolve.
5. **Sustain storytelling:** Keep sharing examples of employees who grow internally. These stories reinforce that the internal career centre works.

Scaling should be incremental, moving from one pilot area to two or three, validating each before broader rollout. Each phase builds credibility, consistency, and culture change. Over time, this shift turns career development from a set of scaled initiatives into an operating system that can be sustained, refined, and evolved.



Key insight:

Effective scaling values wisdom over speed. Every phase should teach the organization how to learn.

Making change stick and avoiding common pitfalls

Successful implementation is as much about people as process. Culture shifts when leaders model the behaviours they want others to adopt.

In Chapter 4, we looked at the cultural and leadership conditions that signal an organization's readiness for change. Now, as you move from planning to practice, a new set of operational enablers comes into play: specific actions and behaviours that sustain momentum and make career development part of everyday work.

Four enablers help internal career centre pilots become embedded norms. Each enabler strengthens the others and, together, they form the social infrastructure that allows an internal career centre to thrive beyond launch.

Table 7.1. Enablers of sustainable internal career centre implementation

Enabler	Description
Visible Leadership Sponsorship	Executives champion internal growth publicly, celebrating internal moves and pilots in town halls or dashboards.
Manager Enablement	Managers receive support to coach, release, and celebrate talent mobility rather than protect headcount.
Peer Champions	Influential employees share positive experiences to build trust and participation.
Transparent Communication	Regular updates and accessible metrics show progress and normalize the language of career development.

Even strong pilots can stall when:

- **Success is invisible.** Failing to communicate early wins reduces momentum.
- **Roles aren't clear.** Without governance, ownership becomes diffuse.
- **Managers feel threatened.** Without support, they revert to talent-hoarding.
- **Measurement is too complex.** Start with 2–3 clear indicators.



Key insight:

Successful implementation depends less on resources than on rhythm: consistent communication, quick learning loops, and small, visible wins that prove the value of internal growth.

Activity: Plan your pilot lab

Purpose: Translate your business case into an actionable, low-risk pilot that tests the internal career centre model.

Step 1: Identify one function or team with both need and openness to experimentation.

Step 2: Choose up to three elements to pilot (e.g., mentoring, internal gigs, skills mapping).

Step 3: Define what success would look like in 90 days, both in data (e.g., internal moves) and experience (e.g., employee confidence).

Step 4: Schedule feedback loops: How will you capture learning and share progress?

Step 5: Draft one short communication to announce the pilot: what it is, why it matters, and how employees can get involved.

Encourage leaders to view the pilot as a learning investment, not a finished product. The insights gathered will shape the model that follows.



The view from HR: Asha's early wins

Three months after launch, Asha reviews the pilot data with Alexander. Internal job applications are up 20%, and mentoring participation has doubled. More importantly, engagement survey comments have begun referencing career visibility and supportive managers.

When the CEO asks for an update, Asha brings stories from employees whose career paths have opened up through the pilot. “We built more than a program. We built confidence that growth is possible here.”

Alexander adds, “That’s what makes it stick. We’re changing people’s mindsets.”

The leadership team agrees to expand the pilot to two additional departments, proof that the organization is ready to move from pilot to practice.

Conversation starter:

What part of your organization is most ready for a learning lab approach to career development? How could you demonstrate quick, visible success within the next 90 days?

REFRAME

Chapter 1



Checklist: Do you need an internal career centre?

You'll gain... A fresh perspective on career development as a driver of business performance.

ARCHITECT

Chapter 2

Map your internal career centre building blocks (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A blueprint for integrating learning, mobility, and mentoring into one ecosystem.

PREPARE

Chapter 4



Checklist: Is your organization ready for an internal career centre?

You'll gain... Clarity on your organization's cultural and structural strengths.

TRANSLATE

Chapter 3

Link your strategy to internal career centre goals (Worksheet)

You'll gain... The ability to link talent development to organizational goals.

BENCHMARK

Chapter 5

Rate your organization's career development maturity (Worksheet)

You'll gain... Insight into where you are today, and what progress looks like.

PERSUADE

Chapter 6

Step-by-step business case framework (Template)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

ACTIVATE

Chapter 7

Plan your pilot lab (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

EVOLVE

Chapter 8

Capture your learning cycle (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A mindset and method for continuous learning and adaptation.

PARTNERSHIP

Conclusion

Join the internal career centre bootcamp

You'll gain... A clear next step to deepen your impact through Challenge Factory partnership.



Chapter 8 | Evolve – Sustain success and keep moving forward

At a glance: Why this chapter matters

- Learn how reflection transforms pilots into sustainable systems.
- Understand how organizations evolve maturity through continuous learning.
- Discover how to capture lessons and stories that fuel momentum.
- Position your organization and leadership team for the next phase of partnership and growth.

From pilot to systemic practice



The view from HR: Nine months later

Nine months after launching the pilot, Asha feels the difference everywhere. Managers are initiating career conversations on their own, and asking HR for help when they need it. Employees speak about internal moves with pride, not hesitation. The new job-posting transparency has become standard practice.

In a leadership meeting, the CFO asks how the internal career centre pilot is progressing. Alexander pulls up a slide with three numbers: retention +9%, internal hires +22%, and engagement +11 points.

But what catches the CEO's attention isn't the data. It's the stories. A young analyst has transitioned into a marketing operations role after mentoring with a senior leader. A project coordinator has found a stretch assignment that built her confidence and visibility.

"We're not just filling roles faster," Asha says. "We're helping people see futures here."

As the discussion closes, the CEO leans back. "This is the kind of system we can build on," he says. "Let's capture what we've learned and plan the next phase."

Asha smiles. That's the turning point from pilot to practice.

Reflection is what turns activity into insight. It's the bridge between doing and embedding. Organizations that pause to evaluate, learn, and refine build sustainable systems rather than costly one-off programs.

In Chapter 7, you explored Challenge Factory's internal career centre Research-to-Practice cycle. Its final stage, Reflect and Evolve, closes the loop and opens the next. This is where pilots become enterprise capability. Through reflection, adaptation, and recalibrated goals, organizations progress from experimentation to systemic practice.

Just as a business case establishes credibility, reflection ensures continuity.

Challenge Factory's Career Development Maturity Matrix™ reminds us that growth happens progressively, from Starting to Developing to Advanced. Advancing along this continuum requires more than expanding programs; it demands deliberate cycles of testing, learning, and adaptation.

At this stage, leaders should ask:

- What evidence do we now have of cultural or behavioural change?
- Which practices or structures need reinforcement?
- How will we capture and communicate what we've learned?

Scaling through storytelling

Data proves the case; stories spread belief. Organizations that sustain momentum share meaning as well as metrics.

Storytelling transforms results into culture. When employees hear peers' growth stories, they begin to picture their own possibilities. Recognizing managers who develop and release talent encourages others to follow.

Encourage teams to document and share stories of internal movement, learning, and transformation. Use multiple channels to make growth visible (town halls, newsletters, internal social platforms).

Each story becomes a signal of progress and belonging.



Key insight:

Frame stories around outcomes, not activities. Instead of "We launched a mentoring program," say, "Three people advanced into new roles after being mentored this quarter."

Measuring to mature

Continuous improvement requires both quantitative and qualitative tracking. Keep measurement simple but consistent, focusing on a few key indicators that align with strategic goals.

Common examples include:

- Internal mobility rate
- Retention in critical roles
- Engagement survey items on growth and development
- Participation in career programs
- Employee testimonials about opportunity visibility

These metrics don't just measure performance. They guide decision-making for future phases. Over time, they form your organization's internal evidence base for the ROI of career development.

Activity: Capture your learning cycle

Purpose: Help your team reflect on what you've learned, what's changing, and what comes next.

Step 1: Gather a small cross-functional group involved in your internal career centre pilot or rollout.

Step 2: Discuss the following questions:

- What have we learned from implementing our internal career centre so far?
- What surprised us?
- What should we stop, start, or continue?
- How has our understanding of career development evolved?

Step 3: Identify one immediate next step and one long-term goal to carry forward.

Step 4: Summarize the insights in one page (your organization's internal career centre learning snapshot).



The view from HR: Asha's reflection

Asha sits in her office looking over the first-year summary of the internal career centre pilot. She underlines a sentence from one of the employee testimonials: “I used to think my career growth had to happen somewhere else. Now I know it can happen here.”

That line captures everything she's hoped for.

The cross-functional team has evolved into a standing Career Development Working Group reporting quarterly to leadership. The internal career centre model is expanding to two new business units, and the analytics dashboard is becoming part of HR's regular reporting cadence.

When Alexander stops by her office, he smiles at the chart on the wall—four loops labeled Test, Learn, Embed, Reflect. “Looks like you've built our own Research-to-Practice cycle,” he says.

Asha nods. “It's a work in progress. But it works.”

Conversation starter:

What lessons from your internal career centre journey so far would you want future leaders in your organization to inherit, and how will you make sure those lessons are shared?

REFRAME

Chapter 1



Checklist: Do you need an internal career centre?

You'll gain... A fresh perspective on career development as a driver of business performance.

ARCHITECT

Chapter 2

Map your internal career centre building blocks (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A blueprint for integrating learning, mobility, and mentoring into one ecosystem.

PREPARE

Chapter 4



Checklist: Is your organization ready for an internal career centre?

You'll gain... Clarity on your organization's cultural and structural strengths.

TRANSLATE

Chapter 3

Link your strategy to internal career centre goals (Worksheet)

You'll gain... The ability to link talent development to organizational goals.

BENCHMARK

Chapter 5

Rate your organization's career development maturity (Worksheet)

You'll gain... Insight into where you are today, and what progress looks like.

PERSUADE

Chapter 6

Step-by-step business case framework (Template)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

ACTIVATE

Chapter 7

Plan your pilot lab (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A compelling story and evidence base to gain leadership buy-in.

EVOLVE

Chapter 8

Capture your learning cycle (Worksheet)

You'll gain... A mindset and method for continuous learning and adaptation.

PARTNERSHIP

Conclusion

Join the internal career centre bootcamp

You'll gain... A clear next step to deepen your impact through Challenge Factory partnership.



Conclusion: From playbook to partnership

Internal career centres are more than a structural innovation. They signal a shift in mindset, elevating career development from HR programming to workforce strategy, from managing turnover to building capability, and from reacting to change to shaping it.

By applying the principles and tools in this playbook, you've taken the first steps toward making career development part of how your organization operates. Sustaining that progress requires ongoing measurement, refinement, and collaboration. That's where Challenge Factory's partnership begins.

As organizations move from early pilots into broader implementation, many find that the challenge isn't understanding what an internal career centre is, but maintaining momentum as priorities shift and the organization grows. Much like technology investments without established standards, ownership, or governance, promising career development pilots can struggle to scale if they aren't integrated and stewarded over time.

To support organizations at different points in this journey, Challenge Factory has developed a practical model called the **Career Infrastructure Operating System™ (CIOS)**. A CIOS provides a structured way to design, test, and evolve an internal career centre, from early experimentation through longer-term scaling, without losing momentum or confidence.

Career development is never a one-time initiative. It's a living capability that strengthens through use, reflection, and adaptation.



Key insight:

Career development works best when it is intentionally designed and actively stewarded over time. Keep learning, adapting, and helping your people grow—and your business will grow with them.

Next step: Entering the Career Infrastructure Operating System™ (CIOS)

For organizations ready to move from insight to informed action, the **Internal Career Centre Bootcamp** is a structured entry point into Challenge Factory's Career Infrastructure Operating System™ (CIOS).

This focused, interactive **working session** helps leaders understand why internal career centres matter, what's at risk when career development isn't designed as workforce infrastructure, and what conditions need to be in place before moving forward.

In the Internal Career Centre Bootcamp, you'll:

- Translate your playbook insights into **clear priorities and next steps**
- Benchmark your organization using the **Career Development Maturity Matrix™**
- Explore the **ROI and risk rationale** for internal mobility and career development using your organizational context
- Learn alongside peers and gain practical guidance and tools to **clarify your direction, scope, and readiness** for an internal career centre within the CIOS pathway

What you'll walk away with:

- A **set of priority actions** aligned to your organization's strategy and maturity
- Practical tools and frameworks to **communicate value and measure progress**
- Greater confidence to lead your next **Research-to-Practice cycle** with clarity and purpose



Ready to take the next step?

Join the Internal Career Centre Bootcamp. Visit www.challengefactory.ca or email consulting@challengefactory.ca to learn more.

Your CIOS pathway: How organizations build and sustain an internal career centre

The Internal Career Centre Bootcamp is one way to enter the Career Infrastructure Operating System, but it's not the only one. Organizations engage with the CIOS pathway at different points based on their priorities, timelines, and readiness. Challenge Factory partners with them across that spectrum, supporting early pilots, targeted interventions, and long-term evolution.

Common ways organizations engage within the CIOS pathway:

Diagnose workforce pressures

Use the Five Drivers of Workforce Change™ to pinpoint where and why workforce strain is emerging and what it means for your career infrastructure design.

Define readiness and requirements

Assess current maturity, clarify success criteria, and establish the structures, roles, governance, resources, and measures needed to embed career development into everyday workforce strategy.

Build the business case and measurement strategy

Translate career development into a clear business case with metrics tied to retention, performance, agility, and risk.

Pilot and test internal career centre components

Design and run targeted pilots, such as mobility, coaching, or manager enablement, to build evidence and momentum through a Research-to-Practice cycle.

Strengthen leadership and manager capability

Equip leaders and managers to act as career enablers, using shared language and practical tools that support employee growth without talent hoarding.

Evolve and scale over time

Refine, expand, and adapt career infrastructure as organizational strategy, maturity, and workforce needs change.

Whether organizations enter through a diagnostic, the Internal Career Centre Bootcamp, or an early pilot, Challenge Factory works alongside them within the CIOS pathway at every stage of their career infrastructure journey.

Glossary

Career agency: An individual's ability to understand their options, make informed choices, and take action to shape their career, supported by clear information, encouragement, and access to opportunities.

Career coaching: One-on-one or group conversations that help employees understand their goals, skills, and options and make their own informed decisions about next steps.

Career development: How people grow in their work over time through learning, experience, and support that helps them see and move toward preferred future opportunities, aligned with labour market realities.

Career growth: Progress made in gaining skills, experience, confidence, and scope of contribution over time, which may or may not involve a change in job title or organizational level.

Career management: Manager-led conversations and supports that help employees clarify goals, build readiness, and navigate next steps in their careers, enabled by organizational tools and expectations.

Career opportunity: Any role, assignment, project, or experience that helps an employee build skills, knowledge, or strengths—not just a promotion or other organizational advancement.

Career visibility: How easy it is for employees to find out what roles, skills, and opportunities exist inside the organization.

Internal career centre: Ensures career development is intentional, coordinated, visible, and aligned to business priorities within an organization.

Career development maturity levels (Starting, Developing, Advanced): Three stages describing how deeply career development is integrated into an organization's practices.

Career Development Maturity Matrix™: A tool that helps organizations assess how well career development is embedded across systems, culture, and leadership.

Champion / peer champion: Someone who models new behaviours and encourages others to participate.

Change readiness: How prepared the organization is, culturally and structurally, to adopt new ways of working.

Digital skills profiles: Simple profiles that map the skills needed for different roles.

Employment value proposition: An organization's promise to employees about what they will gain by working there, such as compensation, culture, recognition, rewards, flexibility, expectations, and growth opportunities.

Equitable access: Making sure all employees, not just a select few, can find and access career opportunities.

Five Drivers of Workforce Change™: Five global forces reshaping work—demographics, employee expectations, new work models, platforms, and technology and automation.

Governance: Who makes decisions, who owns the work, what gets measured, and how accountability is structured.

Hidden talent pools: Employees with skills or potential that aren't visible in current systems or job structures.

Internal mobility: Employees moving into new roles, teams, or assignments within the organization.

Learning pathways: A sequence of learning activities that help an employee grow into a role or skill area.

Mentorship: Guidance and support from someone with more experience.

Intergenerational triads: A mentoring group made up of three people from different generations who learn from each other. Each person contributes their own experience and perspective so everyone mentors and everyone learns.

Performance management: The systems and processes used to set expectations, provide feedback, and assess how well employees are performing in their current roles.

Psychological safety: A work environment where people feel safe speaking openly about growth, challenges, and aspirations without negative consequences.

Research-to-Practice cycle: A method for testing ideas through pilots, learning from evidence, and scaling what works.

Retention: How long employees choose to stay with the organization.

Return on investment (ROI): The measurable benefit (financial, strategic, or cultural) that the organization gets from an investment.

Role-based capability frameworks: Clear guides that outline what “good” looks like in each job.

Skills inventories: Tools that show what skills employees currently have.

Skills-based approach / skills language: A shared way of describing what people can do, so the organization can match talent to work more effectively and build tailored development plans.

Sponsorship: Active advocacy by a senior leader to open opportunities and support career growth.

Stretch assignment / rotational program: Short-term projects or role rotations that help employees build new skills and broaden experience.

Succession planning: Preparing people to step into future leadership or critical roles balanced with organizational needs.

Talent hoarding: When managers resist letting employees move to other teams, even when it supports their growth.

Talent management: The systems and processes used to develop, deploy, and retain talent over time, including career development, internal mobility, succession, and workforce planning.

Talent marketplace / internal job postings / opportunity board: A place where employees can see open roles, projects, or gigs and apply for them internally.

Talent pipeline: A pool of employees prepared to move into key roles.

Talent intelligence: Insights from data that help leaders understand skills, mobility patterns, and workforce risks.

Talent intelligence platforms: Systems that help leaders see skills across the organization and spot gaps.

Workforce agility: How quickly an organization can move people into the roles where they're needed most.

Workforce planning: How an organization anticipates future talent needs, including what roles, skills, and capabilities will be required.

Appendix A | Career Development Maturity Matrix™ – Indicators by HR practice area

The following expanded version of the Career Development Maturity Matrix™ provides a deeper look at how maturity appears across HR practice areas. Each dimension includes indicators for starting, developing, and advanced maturity.

Use this table to guide self-assessment discussions and identify the evidence or data you can track to demonstrate progress.

How to use this appendix in your assessment

1. Review each dimension and HR area with your cross-functional team.
2. Circle or highlight the stage that best reflects your organization today.
3. Capture supporting data or examples (e.g., internal hire rate, coaching participation, survey feedback).
4. Revisit your results annually to measure progress and inform your internal career centre roadmap.

For more information about the Maturity Matrix, see Chapter 5.

Dimension 1: Quality

The degree to which career development practices are intentional, evidence-based, and aligned with organizational strategy.

HR practice area	Starting maturity	Developing maturity	Advanced maturity
Talent mobility	Internal mobility informal; most roles filled externally.	Some pathways mapped for select functions; internal hires increasing.	Clear, transparent pathways across the enterprise; majority of roles filled internally.
Learning and development	Training compliance-driven; no personalized plans.	Employees create basic development plans linked to reviews.	Personalized, evolving plans tied to future skills and career pathways.
Performance management	Reviews focus on past performance only.	Career conversations encouraged but inconsistent.	Career growth embedded in regular appraisal and feedback cycles.

Succession planning	No structured pipeline; replacements reactive.	Plans exist for key roles; pipelines shallow.	Robust succession coverage across levels with ready-now talent.
Technology	Career tools absent or fragmented; no integration with HR systems.	HRIS includes some development planning; partial system links.	Integrated platforms align learning, mobility, and career tools enterprise-wide.
Analytics and reporting	No career data tracked or analyzed.	Some participation and internal mobility tracking.	Advanced analytics link workforce forecasting with skill needs.
Career support services	Ad hoc coaching or mentoring with limited reach.	Structured programs in specific areas or functions.	Comprehensive, high-quality services valued across the workforce.

Dimension 2: Capacity

The organization’s ability to deliver career development at scale, ensuring managers, HR, and systems can support growth.

HR practice area	Starting maturity	Developing maturity	Advanced maturity
Talent mobility	No structured rotations or assignments.	Limited pilots or departmental programs.	Enterprise-wide rotations, stretch assignments, and gig opportunities.
Learning and development	Few offerings; no career focus.	Broader portfolio but siloed delivery.	Diverse, blended learning portfolio aligned with strategic skills.
Performance management	Managers lack skills for career coaching.	Some managers trained but inconsistent.	Career coaching is a core management capability.
Succession planning	Focused only on executives.	Extended to select critical roles.	Systematic coverage across business lines and geographies.

Technology	Minimal or fragmented tools.	Adoption of learning or mobility platforms underway.	AI-enabled tools and predictive systems in place for career growth.
Analytics and reporting	No career metrics tracked.	Participation and utilization data tracked occasionally.	Predictive analytics inform workforce planning and program design.
Career support services	Few or no services; under-resourced.	Programs exist but limited reach.	Scaled and resourced services available enterprise-wide.

Dimension 3: Cohesion

The extent to which career development is integrated across culture and systems, with shared ownership between employees, managers, and leaders.

HR practice area	Starting maturity	Developing maturity	Advanced maturity
Talent mobility	Internal moves discouraged or rare.	Leaders selectively support mobility.	Leaders champion and model internal moves as part of employment value proposition.
Learning and development	No peer or mentoring culture.	Localized networks or pilots.	Organization-wide mentoring and peer learning embedded in culture.
Performance management	Career conversations absent from check-ins.	Occasional discussions encouraged.	Regular, high-quality career conversations are standard.
Succession planning	Advancement opaque; inequities unaddressed.	Diversity tracked but inconsistent.	Inclusive pipelines proactively managed for equity and representation.
Technology	Systems not integrated across HR functions.	Some coordination between HRIS, L&D, and talent platforms.	Unified technology ecosystem supports shared data and access.

Analytics and reporting	No cultural insights on career development.	Engagement surveys include limited career questions.	Robust analytics reveal patterns in access, inclusion, and engagement.
Career support services	Perceived as optional extras.	Some valued programs but inconsistent uptake.	Services widely embraced and integrated into employee experience.

Dimension 4: Access

The degree to which all employees can find, understand, and use career development resources easily and equitably.

HR practice area	Starting maturity	Developing maturity	Advanced maturity
Talent mobility	Internal opportunities shared informally.	Jobs posted inconsistently.	Transparent talent marketplace accessible to all employees.
Learning and development	Low awareness of available programs.	Participation uneven across groups.	High, equitable participation across workforce segments.
Performance management	Employees unclear on career paths.	Some visibility through review discussions.	Clear, documented career paths visible to all employees.
Succession planning	Employees unaware of internal career tracks.	Communication about select tracks.	Communicated, visible career tracks with success stories.
Technology	No centralized career resource hub.	Basic intranet or HR portal for jobs and training.	Integrated, user-friendly career platform providing seamless access.
Analytics and reporting	No monitoring of demand or satisfaction.	Demand tracking inconsistent (sign-ups, waitlists).	Systematic tracking of usage and satisfaction informs program design.
Career support services	Hard to locate; low usage.	Services available but not promoted widely.	Highly visible, accessible, and widely used across workforce groups.

Appendix B | Internal career centre business case template

This template provides an example of how a complete business case for an internal career centre might be structured. It is intended as a starting point to guide your own proposal development and should be adapted to reflect your organization's specific context, data, and decision-making processes.

Use it to organize key information, ensure strategic alignment, and communicate your recommendations clearly to senior leaders.

Cover Page

Internal Career Centre Business Case Proposal

Submitted by:

Department:

Date:

Version:

Executive Summary

Provide a concise overview summarizing the rationale for establishing an internal career centre, the expected benefits to your organization, and the specific request for approval, funding, or sponsorship. This section should be no more than 1–2 paragraphs.

Purpose and Opportunity

Briefly describe the workforce challenge or opportunity this proposal addresses. Why is action needed now? Include supporting data such as turnover, engagement, internal hiring rates, or skills gaps.

Strategic Context

Explain how this proposal supports your organization's broader strategic priorities or workforce objectives. Reference specific goals, initiatives, or KPIs that align with this proposal.

Value Proposition and ROI

Describe the tangible and intangible benefits this initiative will deliver. Include both quantitative metrics (e.g., ROI, cost reduction) and qualitative benefits (e.g., culture, DEI, employee engagement).

Metric	Current Baseline (%)	12-Month Target (%)	Expected Benefit
Internal Hire Rate			Enter benefit here...
Voluntary Turnover			Enter benefit here...
Employee Engagement			Enter benefit here...

Proposed Model and Approach

Outline the proposed structure and scope of the internal career centre. Describe its components (e.g., coaching, mentoring, internal mobility, learning pathways), governance model, and any pilot plans. Identify the key interest holders or teams involved.

Risks and Mitigation

Identify potential barriers to success and describe mitigation strategies for each. Add additional rows as needed.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Manager resistance to internal mobility	Medium	High	Implement communication plan and pilot champions

Phased Implementation Plan

Outline the stages of implementation for the internal career centre.

Phase	Timeline	Key Activities	Milestones / Deliverables
Phase 1 – Pilot	Q1	Launch pilot hub in Operations	Define success criteria
Phase 2 – Evaluation	Q2	Assess pilot results	Develop scaling recommendations
Phase 3 – Scale and Embed	Q3 – Q4	Roll out enterprise-wide	Establish governance and communication plan

Investment and Resource Summary

Estimate the total investment and resource requirements to implement the internal career centre. Include potential cost offsets or savings.

Category	Description	Estimated Cost	Notes / Offsets
People	Enter description...		Enter notes...
Technology	Enter description...		Enter notes...
Program Delivery	Enter description...		Enter notes...
Total Estimated Cost	Enter description...		Enter notes...

Decision Request

Clearly specify the approval, endorsement, or investment being sought. Identify decision-makers and desired approval timeline.

Example: Requesting executive approval to launch a six-month pilot of the internal career centre, with the CHRO as executive sponsor and a budget of \$120,000.

Appendices (Optional)

Attach supporting information such as readiness assessments, Maturity Matrix results, data summaries, or communication plans.

Appendix C | Conversation starters for teams

Use these prompts to spark reflection, dialogue, and alignment at every stage of your internal career centre journey.

These conversation starters appear at the end of each chapter. This appendix brings them together as a single resource to help you revisit key questions, facilitate cross-functional discussions, and support organizational learning as you design, implement, and evolve your internal career centre.

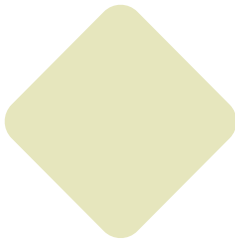
How to use this appendix

- **Facilitation:** Use these prompts to open leadership discussions, team sessions, or cross-functional workshops.
- **Reflection:** Invite individual journalling to deepen learning after each chapter.
- **Planning:** Select 1–2 conversation starters to guide agenda-setting for an internal career centre working group.
- **Measurement:** Revisit these questions annually to capture organizational learning and evolution.

Learning path stage	Chapter	Conversation starter	Purpose
Reframe	1. See career development as strategy	<p>Which of the Five Drivers is creating the most pressure in your organization right now? How could stronger internal career development help you respond?</p> <p>What workforce pain points are most visible in your organization right now? Which of these issues might be symptoms of a system problem that focusing on career development could solve?</p>	<p>Surface the external forces shaping your talent strategy and connect them to the need for a systemic approach to career development.</p> <p>Identify the immediate workforce symptoms that signal deeper system issues and help teams distinguish between isolated HR problems and structural gaps that an internal career centre can solve.</p>

Architect	2. Design a system for growth	Which of the six internal career centre components is strongest in your organization today? Which one, if strengthened, would make the greatest difference to employee experience and business agility?	Help teams assess the state of their career development infrastructure and identify leverage points for design.
Translate	3. Connect people growth to business strategy	How does your organization currently define workforce success? What would need to change for career development outcomes to count as part of that definition?	Shift conversations from HR activity to business impact, enabling shared strategic language across leaders.
Prepare	4. Assess your readiness for change	What attitudes, systems, or habits in your organization might unintentionally block career growth? What small, visible changes could begin to shift those norms?	Reveal cultural and structural barriers and identify early behavioural wins that build trust and readiness.
Benchmark	5. Evaluate your career development maturity	Which of the four dimensions (Quality, Capacity, Cohesion, or Access) represents your organization's greatest strength? Which one, if improved, would most enhance employee experience and internal mobility?	Guide teams in interpreting Maturity Matrix insights and setting targeted priorities.
Persuade	6. Make the case for investment and support	What data, stories, or early wins could you use to demonstrate the value of career development to your leadership team?	Support successful business case development through evidence gathering and narrative framing.

Activate	7. Turn strategy into practice	What part of your organization is most ready for a learning-lab approach to career development? How could you demonstrate quick, visible success within the next 90 days?	Help teams identify pilot sites and set actionable expectations for learning cycles and early proof.
Evolve	8. Sustain success and keep moving forward	What lessons from your internal career centre journey so far would you want future leaders in your organization to inherit, and how will you make sure those lessons are shared?	Encourage reflective practice, knowledge transfer, and long-term system stewardship.



Certified



Corporation

This company is committed to
accountability, transparency,
and continuous improvement.

ISBN 978-1-996817-00-1
9 0000



9 781996 817001