From Our Journey to Your Roadmap:

Building Career Pathing at Your Organization

An interactive case-study workshop



Presented by:
Molly Mapes, M.Ed. - *Sr. Manager of Talent and Development*

Agenda

01 Introduction

02 Our career pathing conundrum

03 Evolving our framework

04 Designing the Career Pathing Framework

05 Examples of our Career Pathing Tool & Implementation

06 Lessons learned, early impacts, and key takeaways

07 Questions

Molly Mapes

SR. MANAGER OF TALENT AND DEVELOPMENT

YEARS WITH DUDEK:

5 years

EXPERTISE:

Talent Acquisition, Employee Development, Employee Engagement.

TYPE OF PROJECTS YOU MOST ENJOY:

Creative challenges and digging in on hard to solve issues.

FUN FACT:

Former puppy raiser For Guide Dogs of America.



Who are we?

Dudek is a 100% employee-owned environmental, planning, and engineering consulting firm headquartered in Encinitas, CA.

Our planners, scientists, and engineers help clients plan, design and build projects that improve our communities' built and natural environments.



Founded in 1980, Dudek *and has grown to 1,000+ employees across 17 offices nationwide as well as remote locations.*

TYPE OF PROJECTS WE WORK ON

Infrastructure and Water Resources
Supporting water, wastewater, and stormwater systems, treatment facilities, and conveyance projects.

Environmental and Regulatory Compliance
Studies, permitting, biological and cultural surveys, CEQA/NEPA documentation.

Habitat and Ecosystem Work
Restoration planning and mitigation, wetlands design, and native habitat management.

Urban and Land-Use Planning
Integrating engineering with planning and design for community development.

AUDIENCE POLLING QUESTIONS

Does your organization currently provide:

Clear career levels or paths?

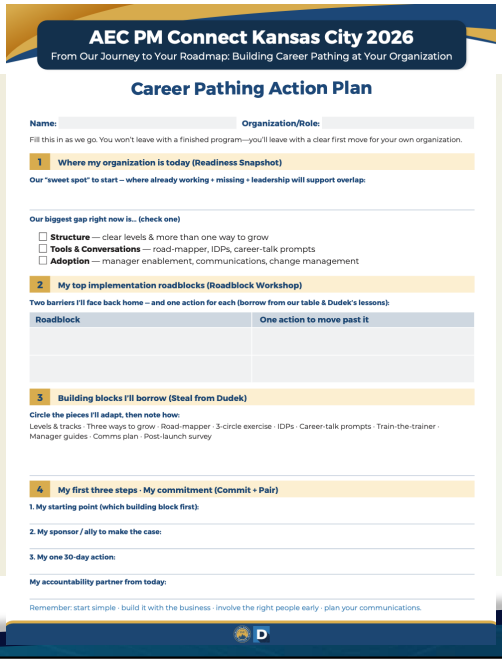
Do you offer more then one way to grow?

Manager training for career conversations?

Transparent advancement criteria?



Career Pathing Action Plan Worksheet



AEC PM Connect Kansas City 2026
From Our Journey to Your Roadmap: Building Career Pathing at Your Organization

Career Pathing Action Plan

Name: **Organization/Role:**

Fill this in as we go. You won't leave with a finished program—you'll leave with a clear first move for your own organization.

1 Where my organization is today (Readiness Snapshot)

Our "sweet spot" to start – where already working + missing + leadership will support overlap:

Our biggest gap right now is... (check one)

- ☐ **Structure** — clear levels & more than one way to grow
- ☐ **Tools & Conversations** — road-mapper, IDPs, career-talk prompts
- ☐ **Adoption** — manager enablement, communications, change management

2 My top implementation roadblocks (Roadblock Workshop)

Two barriers I'll face back home – and one action for each (borrow from our table & Dudek's lessons):

Roadblock	One action to move past it

3 Building blocks I'll borrow (Steal from Dudek)

Circle the pieces I'll adapt, then note how:

Levels & tracks · Three ways to grow · Road-mapper · 3-circle exercise · IDPs · Career-talk prompts · Train-the-trainer · Manager guides · Comms plan · Post-launch survey

4 My first three steps · My commitment (Commit + Pair)

1. My starting point (which building block first):

2. My sponsor / ally to make the case:

3. My one 30-day action:

My accountability partner from today:

Remember: start simple · build it with the business · involve the right people early · plan your communications.

Our Career Pathing Conundrum

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The Talent Reality

Employees don't leave organizations because growth doesn't exist – they leave because they can't see it!

Key workforce challenges organizations face today:

Organizations struggle to make career paths clear, visible, and consistent

Career mobility is critical to engagement and retention, yet difficult to operationalize

Lack of clarity results in stalled growth, disengagement, and turnover

What We Were Hearing

EMPLOYEE THEMES

Although career pathing existed, visibility into growth and career opportunities was limited

Unclear expectations for advancement and development

Perception that growth often requires leaving

SUPERVISOR THEMES

Desire to support growth, but limited tools/framework

Inconsistent understanding of career paths across roles

Uncertainty about how to guide career conversations

HR PERSPECTIVE

Career development practices were informal and inconsistent

Progression expectations varied across practices, creating equity risk

Inconsistent job leveling created *potential* compensation challenges

What This Told Us

1. Growth opportunities existed, but paths were not visible or consistent – especially across practices
2. Career conversations varied greatly by supervisors and by practice
3. Lack of structure created risk across engagement, equity and compensation

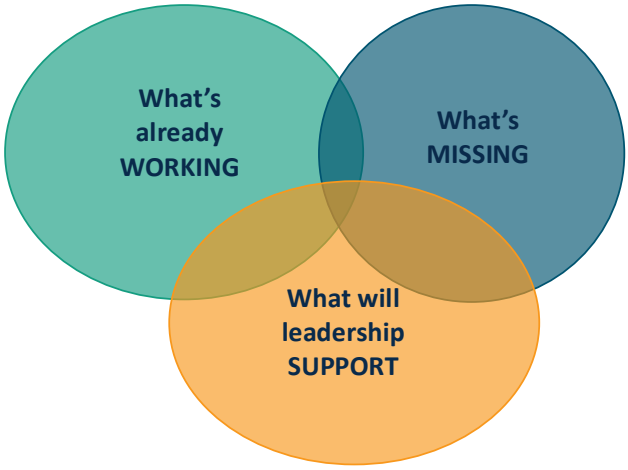
It was clear that the issue was systemic, not isolated and action was needed!

What We Were Solving For

What did we decide needed to change?

1. Clear, visible career paths across roles and practices
2. Consistent progression expectations and job leveling
3. Better tools to support meaningful career conversations
4. A scalable approach that supports growth, equity, and mobility

Assess: Where Is Your Organization Today?



- What career-growth pieces do we already have (even informal)?
- What's clearly missing — levels, tracks, tools, conversations, support?
- What would our leaders actually back right now?
- Where do those three overlap? That's your starting point.

Evolving Our Career Pathing Framework

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Career Pathing – New Firmwide Lens Approach

New approach using a ***firmwide lens*** to provide a clear and consistent career development framework across all practices and shows our commitment to equity across different roles and levels at the company.





Introduction of new Career Tracks

Practice Framework introduces three professional tracks:

Technical | **Project Management** | **Business Operations**

Level I | **Level II** | **Level III**



Expanded Leadership Opportunities

- Business and Strategic Leadership
- Thought Leadership and Technical Expertise
- Business Operations
- Project Management

Designing the Career Pathing Framework

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Our Design Principles

The principles guiding the framework

Transparency	Provide clarity and help employees understand expectations
Flexibility	Expanded career path options including leadership roles
Consistency	Same standards and structure across the firm
Equity and Fairness	Connection between structure and compensation
Alignment	Alignment between employee skills, passions and business needs
Employee Ownership	Careers are employee-driven, but supervisors supported

Start with the work, not titles. Ask Questions.

We asked leaders and technical SME's:

- What differentiates strong performers at each level?
- What does success look like at each level?
- When do people become more technical focused versus project management and business development?
- What does an employee need to be demonstrating to be ready for the next level?

This helped move conversations from:



Build out leveling/Career Mapping

The goal was to help employees visualize growth.

- Technical expert progression
- Project leadership growth
- Business Operations leadership pathway

Key design decisions:

- Advancement should not require managing people.
- Advancement should not require focusing only on project management or business development
- Increase alignment on level expectations across the firm

Make It Usable and User Friendly

Career frameworks fail if they stay theoretical. We focused on creating tools that managers and employees would actually use.

1. Interactive Career Pathing Guides
2. Level Expectation Summaries
3. Manager Conversation Tools
4. Employee Career Evaluation Tools
5. Job Description Library

FRAMEWORK BUILDING BLOCKS

What's Your Starting Point?



Define Levels & Tracks

The structure: clear levels and more than one way to grow (technical, PM, leadership).



Build Tools & Conversations

The everyday layer: a simple road-mapper, IDPs, and career-conversation prompts.



Enable Managers & Change

The adoption layer: manager training, communications, and rollout support.

Examples of our Career Pathing Tools

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Implementation

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The Importance of Change Management

Rollout components may include:

1. Leadership alignment
2. Manager education and pre-built slide decks (Facilitator Guides)
3. Employee communications
4. Integration with performance conversations
5. HR partnership with leaders

Define Key Roles & Expectations

Senior Leaders
Champion

Promote and champion Career Pathing on a firmwide level

Practice Directors
Champion/Implementer

Implement and champion roll-out of Career Pathing to practice, support supervisors in executing timelines and expectations

Supervisors
Guidance / Support

Actively guide and support supervisees through career pathing questions and meeting 1:1 to ensure goal setting alignment

Human Resources
Program Management / Support

Provide career pathing materials and tools, support for communications, and manage career pathing and goal setting programs

Employees
Implementer

Empowered to take an active role in their career path, working in partnership with supervisor to have open communication and goal alignment

Our Communication Plan

Key details:

1. Train the Trainer sessions for Practice Leaders including Career Pathing launch toolkit
2. Training for supervisors and their role in career pathing
3. HR sent firmwide messages informing employees of upcoming career pathing sessions within their respective teams
4. HR embedded career pathing throughout the employee lifecycle – *ongoing process!*
5. Employee and Supervisor survey – 1 year post launch *(planned for March/April 2026)*

Building Blocks You Can Borrow

Levels, Tracks & “Ways to Grow”

Clear levels with multiple tracks (technical, PM, leadership) — plus growth that isn’t only ‘up’: move up, grow stronger in place, or grow what you know.

Simple Career Tools & Conversations

A road-mapper, a 3-circle ‘sweet spot’ exercise, IDPs, and career-conversation prompts — kept simple so people actually use them.

Change Management That Sticks

Train-the-trainer, manager guides & facilitator decks, a communications plan, defined roles, and a post-launch survey to keep improving.

Lessons Learned, Early Impact & Key Takeaways

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Lessons Learned – What Worked Well

Career pathing needs to be built with the business, not just for the business.

1

Framework = Real Work

Increased leadership buy-in

Helped avoid an "HR designed career model"

2

Rollout/Implementation Plan

Designed for each level of the business

Plug and play materials for managers to use

3

Talented Colleagues

Team who believed in this work and worked tirelessly

Lessons Learned – Roadblocks We Faced

- **Balancing consistency with flexibility across many disciplines and roles proved challenging when designing a framework that worked for all teams**
- **Resisting over-complexity** and making deliberate choices about what to include—and what to set aside
- **Clarifying scope and timeline early,** including the level of effort required
- **Ensuring the right people were involved** at the right points in the process
- **Building in clear review cycles** and decision-making time
- **Managing employee expectations** throughout design and rollout
- **Aligning career pathing with the broader employee lifecycle**, including hiring, onboarding, performance, and development

Tackle the Roadblocks

What's Getting In the Way?

"Leadership won't prioritize it."

Dudek's lesson: Build it WITH the business, not just HR — tie it to retention & growth

"We don't have the bandwidth or budget."

Dudek's lesson: Start small — one practice, one pilot, a few high-impact tools

"It'll get too complex."

Dudek's lesson: Resist over-complexity; keep it simple and understandable

"Managers aren't equipped for career talks."

Dudek's lesson: Train the trainer, manager guides, and conversation prompts

Impact

What we have seen so far:

1. Improved clarity and consistency in career paths across roles and practices – including creating new levels, tracks and leadership opportunities
2. Stronger, more confident career conversations between managers and employees
3. Increased alignment between role expectations, leveling, and compensation
4. A scalable foundation to support engagement, development, and mobility
5. More to come...

Commit: Your First Three Steps

1

Name your starting point

Which building block will you tackle first?

2

Find your sponsor/ally

Which leader will help you make the case?

3

Pick one 30-day action

A first, doable move within the month.

4

Share for accountability

Who will help you stay accountable?

Key Takeaways

- **Explain the WHY**
- **Collaboration is KEY and involve SME's early**
- **Start simpler than you think**
- **Managers need coaching and clear messaging**
- **This work is an ongoing process/system with yearly review**
- **Pilot before you pitch**

Take It Home: Your Career Pathing Starter Kit

Start simple, then scale

A few high-impact pieces beat a giant framework no one uses.

Build it WITH the business

Tie it to retention and growth; don't make it 'an HR thing.'

Involve the right people early

Leaders, managers, and employees — clear roles and expectations.

Plan communications & enablement

Managers need training; people need to hear it more than once.



QUESTIONS

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