



harmonics
People Change

Creating a 'Future Fit' Organisation Now.

Transforming Career Development
into Business Performance

by John Fitzgerald



Find out if your organisation is
structured for future success at
futurefitsurvey.org

Navigating Three Unique Perspectives

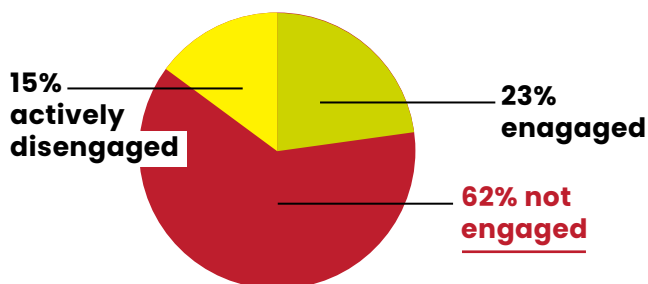


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In 1998, Gallup developed the Q12 Employee Engagement Survey to help organizations gauge how employees feel about their work, career fit, and future prospects. However, despite 27 years of data collection, engagement levels remain stubbornly low:

2024
Gallup
Report

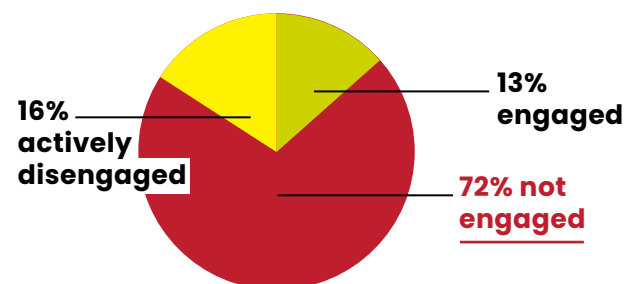
Global Engagement



Only 23% of employees worldwide are engaged, while 62% are not engaged, and 15% are actively disengaged.

2024
Gallup
Report

European Engagement:



An even starker picture, with just 13% engaged, 72% not engaged, and 16% actively disengaged.

If sales figures were continually low year on year, would senior leadership teams tolerate these numbers? **I don't think so!** Yet, year on year HR teams are tasked with improving critical low scoring areas—such as career development, a perennial low-scoring category.

The HR Challenge: Addressing Career Development

Each year, HR teams reach out to us looking for solutions, a typical call might go like this:



We've completed our annual engagement survey, and career development is an area we need to work on. Can you help us by delivering some career development workshops or talks?

However, career development initiatives should never be just about improving annual engagement scores – it should become a part of 'the way things are done around here' in the future.

But this requires behaviour change not just attending a workshop or an empowering talk.

We know talent are attracted to learning organisations with a purpose and where they can learn new skills and that talent move on if they are not developed – **Gen Z stay with an employer just 27 months on average**. When designing career development initiatives, to address this challenge, HR need to dig deeper and ask some pertinent questions and take into account multiple perspectives.

Misaligned priorities between employees, managers, and the organization create confusion. With so much change, professional skills now become outdated within five years, twice as fast as they did a decade ago. Throwing money at recruitment and retention is not the solution either. Organisations need to adapt to the new reality. They must invest in developing new skills and capabilities to create a Future Fit Organisation. It's survival of the fittest in this much changed future of work landscape.

Differing Perspectives on Career Development:

- **For the employee:**

Career development can mean future skills growth, career progression, personal fulfilment, job security, or networking opportunities.

- **For the managers:**

Career development can mean talent retention, succession planning, backfilling for maternity leave, performance management, or preparing employees for new roles.

- **For the organisation:**

Career development is a critical investment in the future of the people who will sustain the business.

Missed Opportunities

There is growing research which supports our view that Organisations are failing to take a systemic approach to career development. Key findings include:

- A Gartner survey revealed that **only 51% of employees** were aware of internal job openings. This can lead them to seek opportunities elsewhere.
- The Work Institute's Retention Report (2023) showed **over 40% of employees** leave their roles for career development reasons.
- While a recent survey by MIT Sloan found that **67% of individual contributors** wish to advance their careers, yet 49% feel they lack adequate career advice.

One off Career Development interventions will not do much to attract or retain critical talent. HR need to be armed with data to build a business case with their Senior Leadership Teams on how to address these challenges in a more systemic way.

The Business Case for Career Development



Creating a Retention Culture:

Organizations that prioritize career development experience **23% higher engagement and 59% lower turnover** (Gallup, 2023). Focusing just on management by objectives will not attract talent today, they also want to feel valued as 'human beings' not 'human resources'.



Reducing Employee Turnover Costs:

Replacing an employee costs **50%-200% of their annual salary** (when you include recruitment, onboarding and lost productivity). A fully Integrated culture of regular, frank, and honest performance and career conversations can proactively address employee concerns before they lead to resignations.



Building a Future-Ready Workforce:

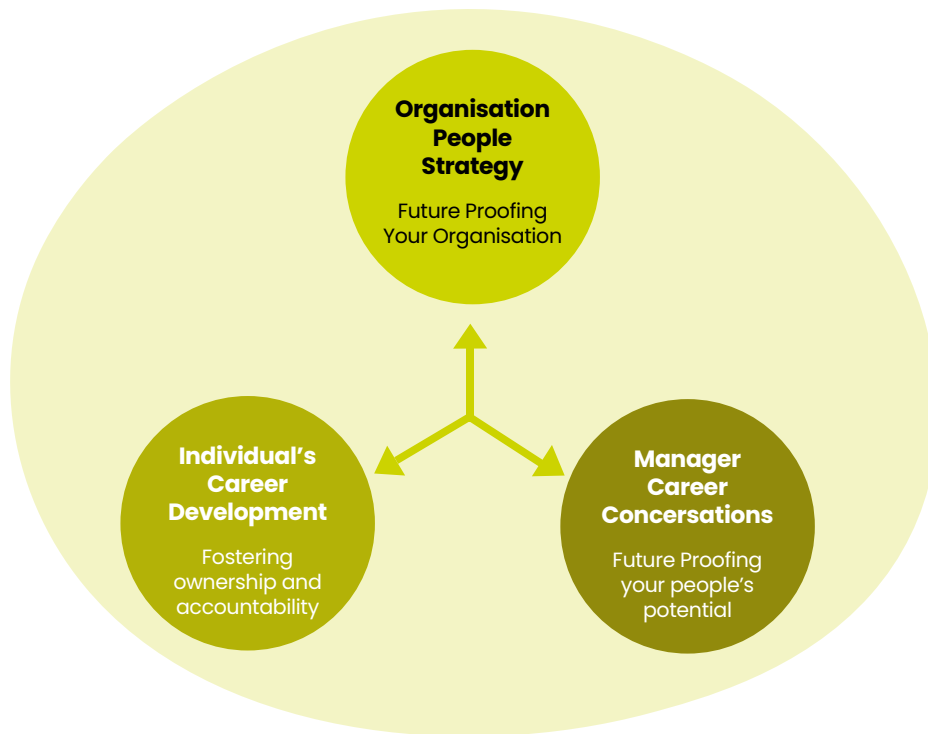
With rapid technological changes, managers are critical in identifying skill gaps and fostering growth. The future is about building a culture of shared career ownership between employee and manager in alignment with the organization future needs.

The Future Fit Organisation

To embed sustainable a Future Fit Organisation, Organizations must take a strategic approach from three perspectives: **the organization, the employee, and the manager.**

Creating the 'Future Fit' Organisation

Guiding principles in aligning Organisations, Managers, and Individual's career expectations with the changing world of work.



1 The Organizational Perspective



Find out if your organisation is structured for future success at futurefitsurvey.org

Every Organisation must deliver value today while also creating value for tomorrow. A 15-year study focusing on hundreds of leadership teams showed **95% of their focus** was **on 'value today' and only 5% on the future**. This a constant competing paradox for leaders to meet short term earnings targets which impacts their time to focus on future sustainable growth.

Jean Gomes in his highly researched book "Leading in a non-linear world" speaks of the need to consciously create 'Future Now Organisations'. These Organisations he says, **"run on the assumption that their existing value is always up for question"**.

The Organisation imperative should be to unblock 'work silos' and 'siloed ways of thinking' which impact future performance. It requires facilitating an approach of thinking collectively and involving multiple stakeholders across the Organisation (each with skin in the game) to uncover the systemic barriers to releasing potential. We have facilitated many of these working sessions and identified common themes in working with clients which had been hampering initiatives for years which include:

Internal silos blocking cross functional moves and leading to retention issues.

Lack of internal job rotation as a required element of previous succession planning

Out-of-date job descriptions not attracting applicants for in demand roles

Annual performance reviews seen as a tick-the-box exercise and not reflecting reality

Tackling legacy Organisation design and reviewing career and reward frameworks must become priority challenges for Business Leaders as AI begins to eat into established work tasks. This requires a systemic approach to creating a Future Fit Organisation led by a fully invested Senior Leadership team. The responsibility cannot just be outsourced to HR as an initiative to fix!

2 The Employee Perspective



Are your people equipped to thrive in a changing workplace? Find out at futurefitsurvey.org

Every individual wants to do their best and is willing to change and adapt for the future if they can see a reason why they need to change. In research by Dan Pink, **people want three things from their work:**

Autonomy – they want to be able to shape their own future.

Mastery – they want to be good at what they do.

Purpose – they want to feel connected to their work.

When Organisations are rolling out yet another change initiative, employees often hear a big focus on the 'what' but less on the 'why' and the 'how'. Employees are now working in more remote and hybrid environments and effectively communicating the 'why' of change was never more important. The 'how' is an important element in developing your people for the 'Future Now Organisation'. Learning Management Systems are overflowing with 24/7 access to libraries of online learning content. It reminds me of the Bruce Springsteen's song, '57 channels and nothin' on'. Employees are overloaded with content and underwhelmed by the impact of the learning resources to support their career development.

Research shows online learning programmes only achieve a 4% completion rate!

Employees who care about their career want personalised content similar to what they can access in their private lives. The challenge is that many corporate online learning systems are simply not fit for purpose in terms of what is required today.

Our research has shown us that every employee is at a different stage of their career. We have profiled these six career stages within an Organisation – **see table below**. People are either onboarding, in growth, contented, hit a career ceiling, frustrated or in a toxic situation.

What Career Stage are your people at now?



Our research shows that only 29% report being in career growth while 42% of people describe themselves as having a hit a career ceiling, frustrated or in a toxic situation. Each person requires specific support, it's 'not a one size fit's all solution'. It is about meeting people where they are on their life and career journey stage.

Here are the challenges we are seeing with employees:

- Lack of awareness of their own skillset and future of work skills in demand
- Busy delivering value today but not taking time to plan for their future tomorrow.
- Failing to have frank and honest developmental feedback with their busy manager
- Poor at proactively seeking out new internal opportunities.
- Seeing career progression as 'promotion only' and not 'career growth'.
- Not knowing what they really want and failing to communicate their 'added value.'

These challenges are all addressable by making small changes to the ecosystem. One of the solutions we have seen work very successfully is to provide short, personalised career development support at specific trigger points along the employee's career journey.

Here are some initiatives we recommend for each career stage:

- **Onboarding** – First 100 Day and Newly appointed Manager Coaching
- **Growth** – New Leadership capability development, External Mentoring, Coaching
- **Contented** – Communicating how change will requires skills development in the future
- **Hit ceiling** – Career Stocktake Coaching to align personal ambition with future reality
- **Frustrated** – Frank and honest Conversations to address their current challenges
- **Toxic** – Typically a relationship issue and mediation often required to resolve

At Harmonics, we incorporate a personal 'just in time' online career coaching approach, it's called **'Energizer'** <https://www.harmonics.ie/energizer/> and incorporates latest future of work insights and guides the individual to gain clarity, make decisions and help them pitch for future internal roles.

A Glimpse into How Energizer Works...



1. We start with understanding your personal story



2. Understanding your Current Career Stage



3. Latest insights on what's changing in work today



4. Taking time to reassess your skills and values



5. The summary builds a clear future career picture



6. The Future Career Conversation

3 The Manager Perspective



Are your leaders cultivating future ready talent? Find your Manager Score at futurefitsurvey.org

Managers play a pivotal role in shaping future potential, yet they are under increasing strain. Many are being asked to implement continuous change while managing stressed teams, balancing business objectives, and coping with their own job uncertainties.

Key challenges they face include:

- **Change Fatigue:** Managers are overloaded with transformation initiatives, making it difficult to provide employees with clear, consistent leadership.
- **AI Disruption:** They lack clarity on how AI will impact job roles, making it a challenge to support career development.
- **Lack of Time for People Development:** Management priorities often focus on quarterly targets, leaving little time to invest in coaching and mentoring employees

The result is that managers, who are expected to be the key enablers of talent development, feel overwhelmed, while employees experience a lack of meaningful career conversations and growth opportunities. They need a space to discuss this among their colleagues in a structured format.

We facilitate '**Career Conversations workshops**' where managers get to meet and understand each other's common challenges, the skills in demand and start to break down silos. We are hearing recurring themes emerge in these sessions:

They are not confident in having candid career conversations with their people.

They haven't taken the time themselves to reflect on their own careers.

They often hoard talent in fear of losing them to the external market.

They suffer from recruiting bias and want a copy of the last person in the role.

They admit not spending time with the 'quiet' yet very talented employee.

Career Conversations workshops should be an annual mandatory requirement for these busy managers to spend the time to come together and share their common challenges. This creates a critical link in the context of the strategic business plan and the talent required to deliver it. These working sessions become a rich source of qualitative data for the Organisation. Here are some themes we uncover in these sessions:

- What career development blockers are showing up in the system?
- How we change 'progression means promotion' to 'progression means growth'
- How we communicate new 'future fit skills' in demand across the organisation?
- How do we communicate in plain language our Employer Value Proposition?
- How do we 'identify, showcase and measure the success' we want to see happen?

Conclusion: Multiple Perspectives for a Sustainable Outcome

Organisations need to rethink their approach to career development to retain a talented and engaged workforce. It's not just about increasing engagement scores, it is a strategic investment in the company's future.

People can become isolated in modern day organisations and lack the proximity they once had to influence key stakeholders. Organisations must become more proactive in communicating what's changing and the new skills in demand in their organisation. Managers are indeed busy people and need to be recognized and rewarded for spending time to invest in the future lifeblood of the Organisation – **the people!**

Employees will adapt to future change if they are treated as human beings and feel a sense of belonging and trust in their leaders.

What is required is an opportunity to stop, pause, reflect and rethink the future Organisation, something we seem to have forgotten in our race to do more with less. AI will always win in the race for more data and more knowledge. We need to focus where we can win. Perspective is the art of observing the world from outside of yourself.

To build a **'Future Fit' Organisation** we need to look at these three perspectives for a more sustainable and a more human approach.

I heard one Senior Leader share this great line of wisdom recently **"I am paid for my perspective, if I'm 'always on' and busy then I have no perspective!"**. It's time for fresh perspectives.

John Fitzgerald

If you want to find out how you rate as a 'Future Fit Organisation' complete this quick survey: **www.futurefitsurvey.org**

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John Fitzgerald is Founder and Managing Director of the **Harmonics Group**, one of Ireland's leading firms in enabling People and Organisation Change.

John is an Executive Coach, Author and Speaker on the Future of Work. He has coached hundreds of Senior Executives over the past two decades to support them in moving up into new positions and maximising their leadership potential. His passion is consulting with Organisations and Business Leaders to help them anticipate Change and Future Proof.

John is the author of **'Future Proof Your Career'** which has been described by many reviewers as a "wake up call" as we face up to an accelerated transition to working through technology.

He hosts **'The Chord' Podcast** where he interviews thought leaders about the Future of Work. John is a Board Member of Rethink Ireland, the social innovation fund that supports communities across the country.

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