

Career Development Program:

From Sproutlings, Grow Mighty Trees



Introduction

Throughout their careers, professionals go through a vital process to become more competent in their roles and industries. This process is called career development, wherein one chooses their career, improves their skills, and advances along a career path.

Employees may feel stagnant or eager to climb the corporate ladder while fulfilling their responsibilities. That said, the majority of companies offer various learning opportunities for those seeking professional growth. These opportunities range from training to taking on another related role or even competition among employees.

The last two years have made learning and development (L&D) more crucial for businesses, and research has the numbers to prove it. 72% agree that L&D has become a more strategic function in their organization¹. Yet, multiple challenges exist, including lack of time and identifying gaps. Hence, employers must improve how they support career development in their workplaces.

Foreword

Why is Career Development Essential for Companies?

Encouraging employees to grow professionally offers several benefits. As individuals work in the “new normal,” they want to know where they’re going, and what a successful career means. Both are vital to employee engagement. Therefore, it’s crucial to implement career development programs that help employees address those questions while adapting to change.

Providing career development opportunities can also help organizations attract talent. Job seekers prefer firms with learning and development opportunities. By offering these opportunities, companies show that they welcome and value immensely driven individuals.

Furthermore, employees can perform their roles better when given career advancement opportunities. If they don’t have direction and guidance, team members won’t be able to deliver their organization’s desired results. Career development allows employees to gain necessary skills, achieve better outcomes, and help their employers grow. It also helps businesses become more productive.

Most importantly, career development at work can boost employee engagement and job satisfaction. Growth opportunities can turn employees into more active contributors to their organization’s work and success while keeping them happy. And finally, these opportunities can help companies retain top talent. Research states that 20% of employees who feel they’re moving further career-wise will stick around for longer².

¹ <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report>

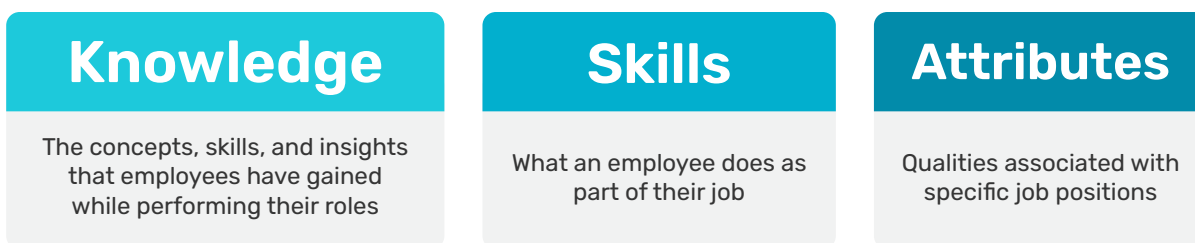
² <https://www.tinypulse.com/blog/17-surprising-statistics-about-employee-retention>

Nowadays, firms see career development as a vital part of employee experience. But some companies may still put it on the back burner or need to know how they can focus more on this area. With that, the Sprout team decided to share its career development process to help organizations encourage professional growth or rethink how they support it. Our process has several steps that help us maximize each team member’s potential, which this resource explores in depth.

Know Your Competencies

Each job comes with specific skills and competencies. They can be as simple as handling administrative tasks or more technical ones, like coding websites. Ultimately, the competencies surrounding particular roles tell us what an employee does every day.

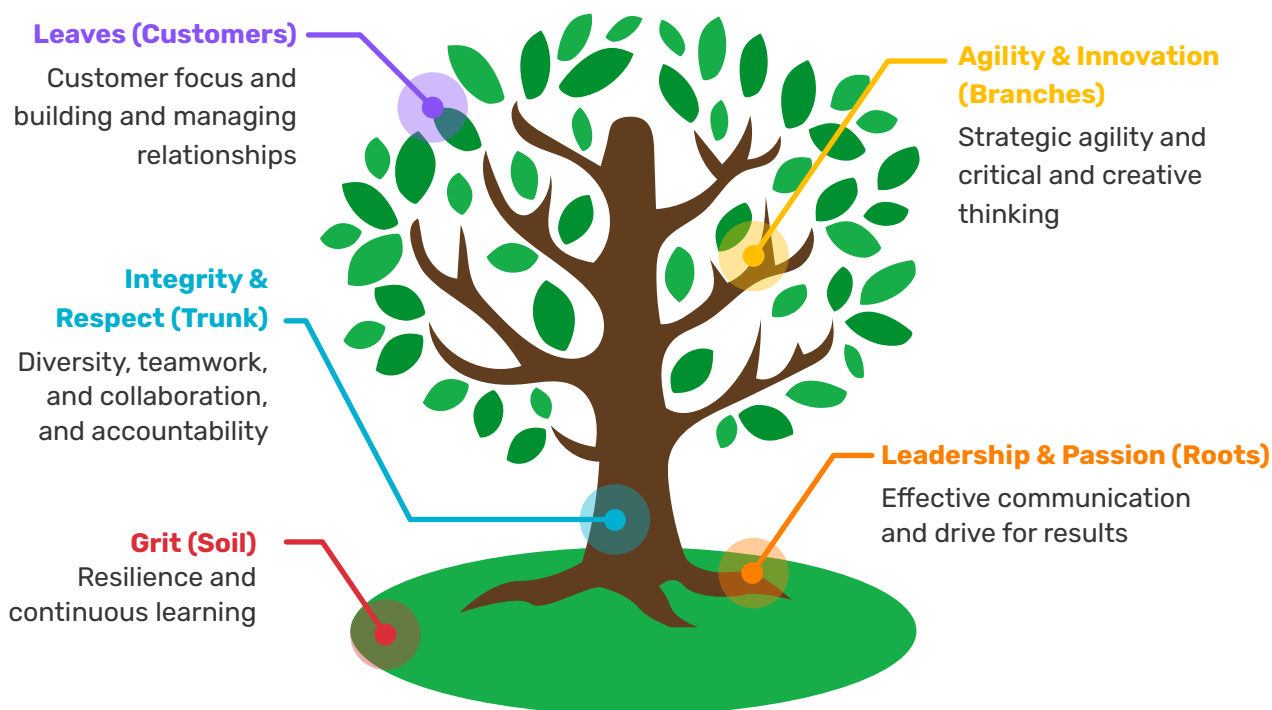
At Sprout, knowing a team member’s competencies involves **three aspects**:



Moreover, we have three main clusters to classify employee competencies: core, leadership, and functional competencies. Let’s look at these clusters one by one.

Core Competencies

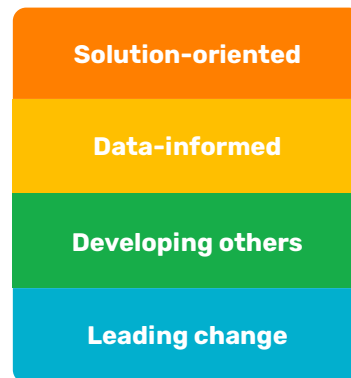
Core competencies are the skills driving overall desired results. We’ve anchored these competencies on Sprout’s core values, with skills reflecting each principle. Here’s how we matched specific competencies to our core values:



Leadership Competencies

These competencies constitute effective leadership within an organization. Essentially, they define how leaders perform their roles and responsibilities. Leadership revolving around these competencies can help companies better identify and mold future leaders.

Like our core competencies, we follow a distinctive approach to leadership competencies. With Sprout’s Brand of Leadership as a guide, we’ve identified the following skills as the ones a leader should possess.



Functional Competencies

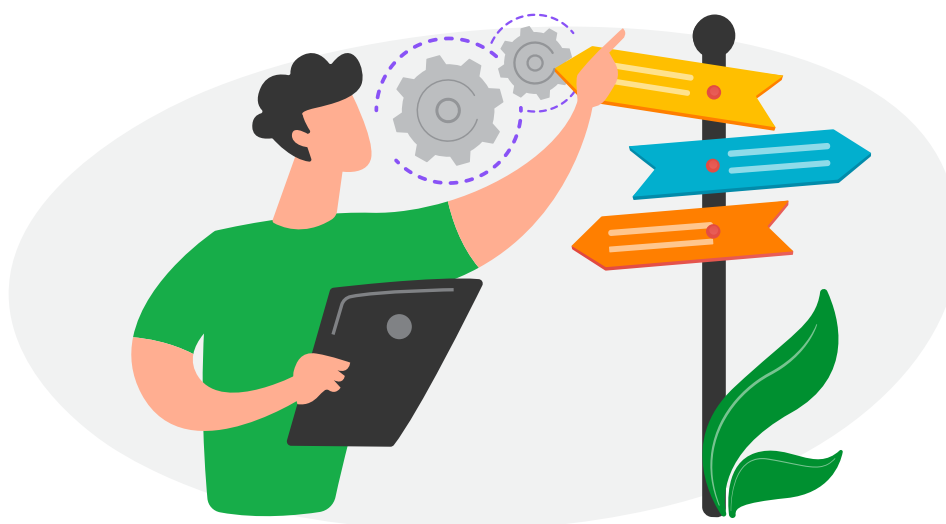
When individuals work at their best, they help their organization achieve the best outcomes. Functional competencies allow employees to reach these goals. Each department has specific skills distinguishing them from other teams within the organization.

Through functional competencies, firms can dig deep into their overall productivity, plan effective skill-based training programs, and gauge an employee’s competency better. Moreover, these competencies help organizations improve and maintain compliance, productivity, safety, and other crucial aspects of their business.

Career Paths

After choosing their desired careers, professionals follow a specific career path. Career paths encompass roles that lead individuals to their short- and long-term goals. Let’s say an employee starts as a junior web content writer. As they develop their current skill set, the individual can take on a more senior role or a related job, like a web content editor. This sequence is an excellent example of a career path.

To help employees grow and progress within Sprout, we’ve established and mapped career paths for them. We use job leveling to plot each Rockstar’s way toward their professional growth and next career phase. Each employee type (entry-level, mid-senior, senior, and executive) has corresponding levels and job tracks showing how our Rockstars advance in their careers.



Our Job Leveling Process

Cluster	Level	Management Track	Individual Contributor Track
Executive	Executive	C-Suite (Corporate Suite)	-
Senior Level	Level 13	SVP (Senior Vice President)	-
	Level 12	VP (Vice President)	Expert
	Level 11	AVP (Assistant Vice President)	Principal
	Level 10	Senior Director	Senior Advisor
	Level 9	Director	Advisor
Mid-Senior Level	Level 8	Assistant Director	Senior Business Partner
	Level 7	Head	Business Partner
	Level 6	Senior Manager	Officer III
	Level 5	Manager	Officer II
	Level 4	Lead	Officer
Entry Level	Level 3	Specialist	Specialist
	Level 2	Senior Associate	Senior Associate
	Level 1	Associate	Associate

From the table above, you'll see two columns labeled **Management Track** and **Individual Contributor (IC) Track**. Employees on a managerial career path follow the Management track, while employees in non-managerial roles go on the IC track.

Also, we established three types of career paths for our Rockstars: vertical, lateral, and cross-departmental.

Vertical Path

The employee focuses on getting promoted and moving up the organization's career ladder. For example, an Associate can work their way up until they become an Expert or a C-suite member.

Lateral Path

The employee gets a new job within the same title, position, job level, and department. At Sprout, several positions have corresponding ranks (up to three). If an Associate performs well at their initial rank, they move to the next level (Associate F2). This path continues until the employee gets promoted to their track's highest position.

Cross-Departmental Path

An employee treading this career path switches job groups or departments. Say a marketing specialist wants to dabble in software development. Once the employer notes this request, they can include the employee in a software development team.

Why Companies and Their Employees Benefit from Career Development?

Previously, we mentioned that career development offers several benefits, including increased employee engagement and retention. Career development programs are a great way for companies to reap those benefits. But how do these programs help organizations and their members in terms of professional growth?

For Employers

By implementing a career development program, companies can provide employees with learning and growth opportunities. Remember: Individuals will choose companies that invest in their professional development. Otherwise, they'll keep looking until they find suitable opportunities.

Career development programs also allow organizations to align an employee's career goals with their strategic goals. In turn, companies can meet business goals and objectives while making themselves stand out and retain talent. And more importantly, career development programs promote learning in the workplace.

For Managers

Professional development programs can benefit managers as well. Through these programs, supervisors can create learning opportunities and offer them to their direct reports. Ultimately, managers can help their employees navigate their career paths by encouraging them to pursue professional development.

For Employees

From an employee's perspective, career development programs can help:

- Clarify the individual's purpose and career goals.
- Provide them with the skills and knowledge they need to perform their role effectively, as well as the direction toward their goals.
- Empower the employee to improve their skills and manage their career.

The Key Elements of Sprout's Career Development Program

Our career development program encompasses the following elements:

Proficiency Levels

Proficiency levels reflect how competent employees are in their roles. We measure an individual's proficiency based on four levels: Basic, Skilled, Advanced, and Expert. Here's a closer look at each proficiency level.

Basic (Understanding)

At this level, the employee starts to learn their specific skill sets and perform their assigned duties and responsibilities. They ask their colleagues or manager to help them apply what they've learned and work on their tasks under full supervision. Also, employees with basic proficiency know the fundamentals of their skills, perform basic tasks, and leave decision-making to their supervisor.

When it comes to supervision, a manager can completely supervise their direct reports or let them perform tasks but still manage them. Finally, employees at this level can follow the organization's basic standards and procedures.

Team members with little to no experience in a specific area of expertise start at the basic proficiency level.

Skilled (Application)

Skilled-level employees have learned specific competencies but only use those skills when necessary. These individuals may need more training to perform particular competencies independently. Skilled-level employees may even ask an expert for help, but they can perform their skill set alone.

While skilled individuals have gained the competencies needed for their role, their sole focus is on assigned tasks. But unlike employees at the basic proficiency level, they get some supervision and additional training. Skilled-level employees also follow specific procedures when performing their tasks.

Another difference between basic and skilled-level employees is their knowledge of a skill's fundamentals. The latter fully understands how that competency works, an improvement

over their knowledge when they started working. Moreover, skilled-level employees take on tasks with minimal analysis involved. Yet, their supervisors still have the final say on crucial decisions. And like their peers with basic proficiency, skilled individuals follow basic standards and procedures.

Essentially, these employees perform their duties and responsibilities with more knowledge about their skill sets, moderate supervision, and more learning opportunities.

Advanced (Development & Enhancement)

Employees perform specific competencies independently during this phase. They execute most activities requiring those skills with clear instructions, standards, and procedures to follow. More importantly, advanced-level employees consistently and satisfactorily deliver most tasks associated with their expertise. These individuals have also grasped basic concepts related to complex skills, and they perform tasks needing minimal analysis.

As new hires and clueless colleagues try to learn more complicated skills, they may need help. This situation is where advanced-level employees come in. Whenever a co-worker asks about a specific competency, people direct them to the individual specializing in that skill. The employee then shows their colleagues how to perform the task and entertains other questions regarding the matter.

Also, workers with advanced proficiency use their expertise to improve processes and other work outcomes. They develop new processes, systems, and policies, innovate, and present actionable steps for more efficient operations.

Expert (Integration & Recommendation)

Like advanced-level employees, experts are able to:

- Help others perform specific skills.
- Understand concepts related to different competencies.
- Devise or refine processes, procedures, and policies.

People in expert roles showcase their competence and experience. They exhibit strong leadership potential, which shows in how they supervise direct reports. For example, they provide solid guidance to help their juniors handle projects.

Experts also play a crucial role in improving an organization's current processes. For example, they may suggest changes to policies, programs, and regulations or be involved in problem-solving in these areas.

Framework

To establish an employee’s career path, we devised a framework combining the four proficiency levels and our core and leadership competencies. We matched each competency to a job level, management track, and proficiency level.

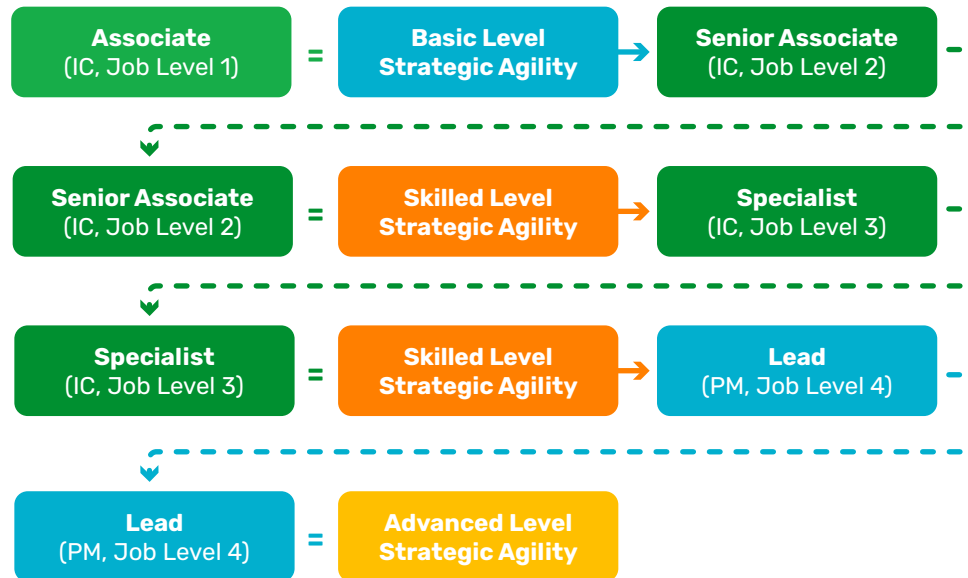
Here’s what our career development framework looks like:

Keys: IC - Individual Contributor Track PM - Management Track B - Basic S - Skilled A - Advanced

Core Competencies x Leadership Competencies				
Job Level	1	2 or 3	4 or 5	
	IC	IC	IC	PM
1. Resilience	B	B	S	S
2. Continuous Learning	B	B	S	A
3. Effective Communication	S	S	S	A
4. Drive for Results	S	S	S	A
5. Diversity, Teamwork, & Collaboration	S	S	S	S
6. Accountability	S	S	S	A
7. Strategic Agility	B	B	S	A
8. Critical & Creative Thinking	B	S	S	S
9. Customer Focus	S	S	S	A
10. Building & Managing Relationships	A	S	S	A
11. Solution-Oriented	B	B	S	A
12. Data-Informed	B	B	S	S
13. Engaging, Motivating, & Developing Others	B	B	S	S
14. Leading Change	B	B	S	S

So, how does this framework work?

Consider this example: An Associate (Individual Contributor) is currently at Job Level 1 and specializes in basic-level Strategic Agility. While working in this position, the employee looks to move up the career ladder. They want to become a Lead (Management) at Job Level 4 with advanced-level Strategic Agility. Hence, the individual’s career path would look like this:



Definition & Indicators

Furthermore, we’ve defined each core and leadership competency and described each proficiency level with behavioral indicators. The definitions for each competency emphasize how an employee applies the skill to their work and within the organization. Meanwhile, behavioral indicators show what’s expected of the individual with that competency. These indicators vary depending on the employee’s proficiency level.

The sample description below explains the skill (in this case, Strategic Agility and how the individual demonstrates it at each competence level.

Strategic Agility

Ability to react quickly to changes inside the business as well as in the external environment in order to avoid disruptive and competitive threats. Ability to adapt strategic approaches as conditions change while embracing the opportunities within innovation.

Basic

- Recognizes when change is necessary to improve upon the status quo.
- Identifies and tracks potential risk and communicates it to necessary individuals.
- Breaks down work into the process steps.

Skilled

- Articulates a change required and how to manage to see the change through.
- Responds to complex clients' concerns in a courteous and friendly manner; and refers challenging client situations to immediate superior.
- Develops schedules and assigns tasks.

Advanced

- Accurately anticipates challenges and creates strategies to meet them.
- Foresees risk and allows for contingencies in planning.
- Accurately scopes out the length and difficulty of projects and tasks.
- Evaluates results.

Expert

- Constant awareness and sensing of relevant developments in the world (shifts in customer expectations, (technological developments, competitor behaviour)
- Assesses risk, its impact, and strategies to mitigate adverse outcomes.
- Strives and empowers the employees and teams to continuously improve and validate the why's, what's and how's
- Helps the organization maintain momentum on the execution of long-range strategic plans through shorter, iterative implementation cycles, meeting both immediate and long-term needs.

Address the Learning Need

Companies use different learning styles and methods when it comes to L&D at work. But most organizations, including Sprout, follow a standard learning model called the **70-20-10** model. It's a general approach or guideline to maximize learning effectiveness and encourage a more learner-centered culture.

How Does the 70-20-10 Model Work?

This learning model suggests that:	
70%	of learning comes from workplace learning.
20%	of learning involves social learning.
10%	of an employee's professional development comes from formal learning.

A closer look at these aspects of the 70-20-10 framework reveals that employees mostly gain new skills and knowledge at work. Hands-on learning equips individuals with specific competencies through new and challenging tasks, plus superior and peer feedback.

Aside from learning on the job, employees can also learn while building and maintaining developmental relationships. Interactions like peer and social learning, feedback and coaching from colleagues, collaborative learning, and mentorship can help workers develop and improve their skill sets.

Finally, the 10% in this learning model constitutes formal learning the employees take to hone their skills. It can be done face-to-face or online.

If employees go for face-to-face learning, they can join training sessions, tutorials, seminars, workshops, and group presentations in classroom-like settings. Meanwhile, online learning can range from virtual courses to educational videos. Organizations can facilitate this type of learning with a learning management system (LMS), which we'll discuss later.

Why Does the 70-20-10 Model Work?

First, people learn concepts and skills in different ways. A web developer, for example, may lean toward educational videos about programming languages. When employees have multiple options for learning, they can gain and master essential competencies however they want.

The 70-20-10 model also promotes actionable learning to boost employee engagement. In turn, team members can meet their career goals, work with peers more, and reach out to others proactively.

Moreover, this framework mainly highlights learning at work and workplace relationships, resulting in scalable L&D programs. Employees can even use the components they need to learn, then move to more intensive, hands-on learning.

The Development Process

When a Sproutling wants to climb the career ladder, we follow a two-part career development process. It includes the launch and development process and the actual career development program cycle.

Initial Launch & Development

We start this process by introducing the competency model and career path tracks to employees in our career development program. The competency framework includes the core and leadership competencies we've established and the proficiency levels corresponding to each job level. Also, we discuss the Individual Contributor and Management tracks with employees.

Next, we evaluate how competent each team member is at a particular skill. We classify individual proficiencies as Basic, Skilled, Advanced, and Expert. After this assessment, we discuss it with the individual and identify the program's focus areas.

Our Career Development Program Cycle

Once we've set the initiatives and timelines in the employee's career development plan, we present them to the individual. If the team member agrees to these conditions, we'll take and implement the specific actions under their CDAP.

Throughout the program, we track the employee's progress and schedule checkpoints on the agreed timelines. We also conduct performance reviews and additional competency assessments to evaluate the individual's performance. Employees who deliver satisfactory work will receive rewards and recognition, and we can promote them to higher positions within the company.

The cycle doesn't stop once team members get recognized for their efforts or advance their careers, though. Employees will go through this process again to acquire more skills and knowledge in their expertise. This way, they can grow and meet their career goals.

Strengthening and Empowering Your Career Development with a Performance and Learning Management System

Your organization is only as good as its employees.

Effective career development programs should be grounded in objective performance metrics. That's why **Sprout's Performance+**, a system that combines performance and learning management, can help provide a clear path for employee development while managing employee performance.

Performance+ automates your development program management based on each employee performance assessment.

This sophisticated software can be divided into two main modules:

Performance Pro

An easy-to-use and extremely sophisticated and customizable Performance Management System that's that includes the following features:

- Flexible performance appraisals
- Performance data and analytics
- Goal library
- Goal management
- Goal cascading
- Goal linking to strategies
- Form workflows
- Language/legal check
- Employee Engagement
- Succession Planning Analytics
- Development Plans
- Career Plans
- Compensation Salary Administration
- Merit Increase Planning and Modeling
- And much more

The Learning Center

Sprout's Learning Center features an extensive library of learning courses that help your employees improve their core competencies to drive company performance. In this library, you'll find over 500 courses on topics ranging from soft skills to compliance.

Once you've chosen suitable courses, you can transfer them to a library of competencies or match learning plans to a particular role. Managers can also include specific courses in new hire reviews or formal employee assessments. Through the Learning Center, you can empower team members to gain and elevate crucial skills in their areas of expertise.

About Sprout

Sprout Solutions is a rapidly growing SaaS company that provides paradigm-changing solutions that address end-to-end HR challenges. The Sprout Ecosystem is a comprehensive, cloud-based People Platform that allows companies to manage all HR data in one place and provides invaluable analytics that aid in better enterprise-wide decision making.

Book a free demo and email us at info@sprout.ph. You can also visit our website: www.sprout.ph to learn more.