

How QVC's Career Development Program Found the Best People for the Job

Finding that it needed to adapt to a changing organization, QVC underwent a significant transformation.

Clear communication of career advancement opportunities is a crucial step for many employers in drawing top talent to their organization. This is especially true in the information technology (IT) function, where career development and advancement are important factors in attracting and retaining talent. For e-commerce retailer QVC, pressure caused by international growth and rapid technological changes created the need for a purposeful redesign of its IT department's jobs and career paths, with the goal of clarifying the future opportunities that may arise.

"In order to keep up with new technology demands and explosive

By Vincent Milich, Hay Group, and Chris Brown, CCP, QVC

growth, our IT department underwent a significant transformation into a global organization with teams successfully working together across markets and time zones,” said Linda Dillman, chief information officer at QVC Inc. “As we continued to increase our global footprint, we saw the need to develop a more robust technical career path for our employees, a crucial step in attracting and retaining today’s top IT talent.”

Creating Clarity

“One of the first steps we took in redefining our IT career paths was to provide clarity on the accountabilities, performance expectations and the key

skills necessary to deliver in each job role,” said Kristin Kelly, senior talent development partner at QVC.

Improving clarity in and across roles often involves writing a lot of job descriptions or conducting multiple roles and responsibility (RACI) analyses. While thorough, these processes become a challenge to communicate and institute.

The trend in leading IT organizations is to streamline the number of job descriptions and create more flexible roles in IT that can adapt to the changing needs of the organization. Managing unique job titles and job descriptions for different technologies and/or systems can result in

having nearly as many job titles/job descriptions as employees.

Creating clarity requires serious work in the definition of roles, which is why QVC subject-matter experts were asked to participate on job-family teams.

Job-Family Teams — Defining the Future

To help foster more transparency, teams of experts in different families of work within QVC IT were engaged to envision the future of their job family and help clearly define it. Important insights included what work was expected in a job family and what was not, how handoffs would occur between roles and across job families,

Figure 1 | Career Track Options for an Associate Applications Developer

Individual Contributor Career Tracks					
Architecture	Applications Development	Business Analysis	Quality Assurance	Project Management	Technical Infrastructure
Technology architect Solutions architect Data architect		IT business architect		Senior project manager	
	Senior applications developer	Senior IT business analyst		Project manager	Senior engineer
	Applications developer		Senior software quality analyst		Engineer
				Associate project manager	
	Associate applications developer	IT business analyst	Software quality analyst		Associate engineer

■ Selected Role
 ■ Possible Next Career Move
 ■ Next “Stretch” Career Move

Figure 2 | Career Track Options for an Associate IT Support Specialist

Individual Contributor Career Tracks						
Business Analysis	Quality Assurance	Project Management	Site Services	Client Services	End User Support	Technology Operations
		Associate project manager	Senior IT support specialist		Senior client support tech	
IT business analyst	Software quality analyst					
			IT support specialist	Senior technical services analyst	Client support tech	Senior operations analyst
Associate IT business analyst	Software quality tester					
			Associate IT support specialist	Technical services analyst	Associate client support tech	Operations analyst

■ Selected Role
 ■ Possible Next Career Move
 ■ Next “Stretch” Career Move

how the “white space” between roles and functions would be managed, what roles would be responsible for what decisions and how success would be measured in a job family. “The job family teams provided QVC a forum to define the future state of IT roles and how each position would work together seamlessly to deliver the work plan” said Francine Ho of Hay Group. It provided an opportunity to clarify work functions, resulting in greater efficiency and replicability of processes, while increasing accountability and enabling a smoother transition of work where necessary.

The result was a common language of jobs in the organization. In the future, when staffing projects, hiring or reviewing promotions, QVC IT leadership will have one common understanding of the accountabilities, boundaries, requirements and performance expectations of each IT job.

More Than Just Dual Career Paths

One of the goals of the project was to provide more career options for IT professionals who did not want to pursue a management career path.

Alternative advancement options are an important retention factor for IT professionals who often are not drawn to management positions. Through the development of job families and career ladder documents, QVC was able to draw a distinction between management and other, equally robust career tracks. And not just “technical” tracks. Having senior roles like business analysts and project leads, as well as architects and engineers, provided career paths for professionals to pursue without becoming managers. Through these improvements, QVC hoped not only to enhance its reputation as an employer of choice but to help attract and retain its top IT talent.

A Career Architecture

After QVC successfully redesigned its career ladders, the next step was to enhance its employees’ perception of their career options at QVC. During previous QVC employee surveys — “Q Perspectives” surveys — IT team members had expressed interest in getting more clarity around their potential next roles and the development that would be needed for them to assume these roles.

The solution was an architecture that demonstrated multiple options for career advancement — both the next logical steps and “stretch” moves. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate an individual’s current role shown in blue, with possible next career moves in green and stretch moves in orange. Lateral and diagonal moves were emphasized to encourage employees to get out of their comfort zones and ultimately build multidimensional IT professionals ready to lead the function in the future.

Supporting the New Career Development Program

While the new approach created a career architecture and defined roles more clearly, it was mostly foundational work and not a full career development program. QVC still needed to begin with an understanding of where each employee was and where each could ultimately end up within the organization. Supporting this journey with development resources, governance and management support was critical to success.

Using Competencies

QVC uses competencies to support employee development. For IT staff, these behaviors were used to point the way for development through the career architecture.

As shown in Figure 3, competencies describe the range of behaviors needed to succeed in a given role.

For most organizations, the tendency is to focus on the skills and knowledge above the waterline when hiring or developing IT staff

because they are easier to see and measure. While these are critical in IT, research shows that it is the items below the waterline that really make someone effective in a role. To optimize career opportunities, companies need to focus more of their energy in hiring for and developing these below-the-line competencies.

Through this project, QVC linked the career architecture and competencies for IT. The competencies most critical to enhancing career development were clearly communicated and the company further supported competency development — and career development, in general — by providing a wide range of development resources that employees could access to address any current shortcomings as well as develop the skills and competencies needed to achieve their career goals.

Governance and Management Support

The final key to ensuring that the new career development program

would remain successful over time was strong support from management. QVC IT leadership strongly committed to the program and now uses it to conduct planning for IT.

The more the program is used, the more it becomes part of the fabric for how IT is managed. It is used to support recruiting, the selection of staff for projects, promotion decisions, succession planning, the assignment of new developmental experiences and career development decisions.

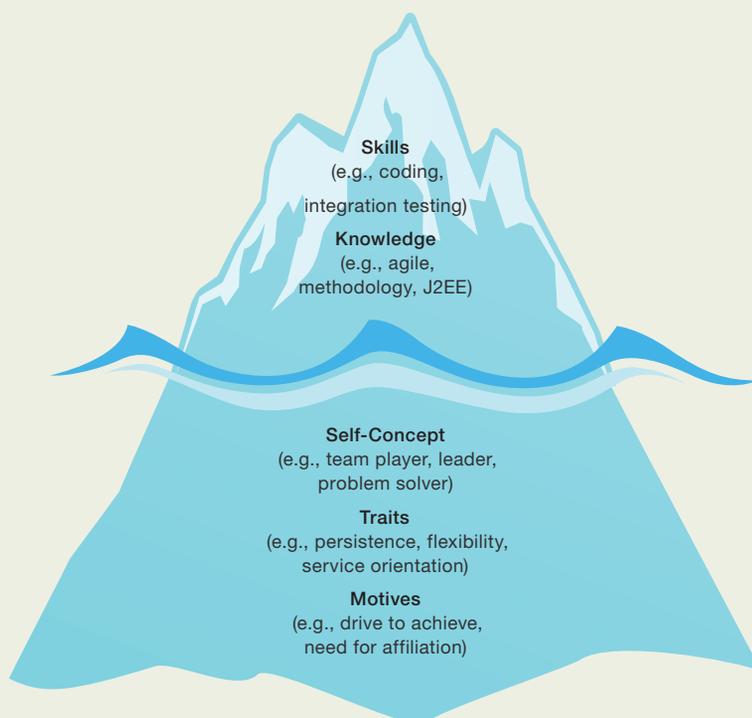
The Results Keep Coming In

Through a well-defined and flexible career architecture, clear job roles and a supportive management team, QVC was able to set a new standard for career development in its IT division. To date, the work has resulted in significant improvements in efficiency and productivity in QVC IT. Handoffs and interfaces between roles are better defined, leading to less redundancy, rework, stress and management intervention. Interfaces with QVC IT's internal customers have become more efficient and customers have even expressed their satisfaction with the changes in the organization. Also, as work is increasingly being done globally, this new organizational model and career development program is being scaled globally, resulting in an even greater positive impact to the business. **WV**

Vincent Milich is vice president and director at Hay Group in New York. He can be reached at vincent.milich@haygroup.com.

Chris Brown, CCP, is a senior compensation consultant at QVC in West Chester, Pa. He can be reached at christopher.brown@qvc.com.

Figure 3 | Illustrative Iceberg Model of Competencies



resources plus

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