

Corporate Strategies for Developing Future Leaders, ETHRWorld

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Building leaders from within: Internal mobility emerges as new leadership engine for corporates

Highlights

- Both Akasa Air and Glenmark Pharmaceuticals see internal mobility as a strategic tool to develop leadership pipelines and prepare employees for larger roles.
- Through the Tata Administrative Services (TAS), high-potential talent gets opportunities to work across different Tata companies, sectors and functions.
- At Vedanta Group, the '3x3x3 Career Growth Framework' is a fast-track acceleration model designed to prepare young professionals and campus hires for early CXO-level and frontline decision-making roles.
- Stretch projects, short-term assignments and cross-functional roles help organisations assess adaptability, problem-solving and leadership potential.

- Lean teams, employee hesitation and skill gaps can restrict career mobility.



Strong leadership pipelines are built when organisations recognise potential early and create opportunities for people to grow beyond their current roles

As companies navigate AI-led transformation, changing skill requirements and increasingly complex business environments, internal talent mobility is emerging as a strategic lever to build the next generation of leaders. Rather than relying primarily on external hiring for critical leadership roles, organisations are increasingly looking within their own talent pools, using cross-functional moves, stretch assignments, short-term projects and structured development programmes to identify and prepare high-potential employees.

The shift is already visible in corporate talent strategies. LinkedIn's 2025 Workplace Learning Report found that 55 percent of career-development leaders and 48 percent of other organisations see [internal mobility](#) as a higher priority for the year ahead.

For CHROs, the shift is not merely about filling vacancies. It is about creating a leadership pipeline that combines institutional knowledge with broader business exposure and prepares employees to take on roles beyond their current functional expertise.

Cross-functional moves shape leaders

At [Akasa Air](#), [leadership development](#) is closely linked to cross-functional exposure, particularly as the airline scales and its operational complexity increases.

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“Leadership at scale is built through cross-functional exposure and a deep understanding of how the airline operates as an integrated system,” says Sejal Haribhakti Mody, Chief Human Resources Officer, Akasa Air. The company’s own leadership structure reflects this approach. Its COO previously served as CMO, while its CCO earlier worked as CTO, helping build the company’s technology landscape.

According to Mody, these transitions demonstrate how leadership capability can move beyond traditional functional boundaries when employees develop a broader understanding of the business.

Planned mobility opportunities give high-potential employees exposure to areas such as strategy, finance and transformation, while creating pathways into commercial and operating leadership roles. “Internal mobility is central to our succession philosophy,” Mody said, adding that the company aims to build leaders from within through deliberate development and exposure, while selectively hiring externally for roles where perspectives from other industries can add value. At [Glenmark Pharmaceuticals](#), internal mobility is similarly being positioned as a part of the broader talent strategy.

Alind Sharma, President and CHRO, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, said internal mobility is a “strategic lever for building careers and organisational capability”.

The company uses Q.U.E.S.T. (Quest to Uncover, Engage and Shape Talent) to identify and develop high-potential employees.

Its ‘GROW’ internal job-posting programme gives employees opportunities to explore roles within the organisation and take greater ownership of their careers. The Glenmark Centre for Learning complements these initiatives with structured learning, on-the-job coaching, stretch assignments and cross-functional exposure.

At [Vedanta](#) Group, internal mobility is also being positioned as a core component of leadership development, with the organisation focusing on identifying potential early and giving employees opportunities to build experience beyond their current roles.

“Strong leadership pipelines are built when organisations recognise potential early and create opportunities for people to grow beyond their current roles,” said Neha Sharma, CHRO, Vedanta Group.

Vedanta’s philosophy of ‘Leadership from Within’ focuses on identifying talent based on aptitude and potential, and providing employees with the exposure, responsibility and experiences required to prepare for larger leadership mandates. The company’s ‘3x3x3 Career Growth Framework’ is a fast-track acceleration model designed to prepare young professionals and campus hires for early CXO-level and frontline decision-making roles.

Tata Group also offers a strong example of how cross-functional and cross-business exposure can be used to build leadership capability.

Through the Tata Administrative Services ([TAS](#)), high-potential talent gets opportunities to work across different Tata companies, sectors and functions, allowing them to develop a broader understanding of businesses rather than remaining confined to a single specialisation.

The approach reflects a wider shift in how companies are assessing leadership potential. Traditional indicators such as tenure, functional expertise and performance in an existing role may not be enough to determine whether someone is ready to lead in a more complex environment.

Real-world exposure to identify future leaders

Aruna Gorur, Global Strategic HRBP, Fujitsu GDU, said internal mobility allows organisations to identify leadership potential through real-world experiences rather than relying solely on traditional assessments or tenure.

Cross-functional assignments and short-term projects can expose employees to unfamiliar challenges, different teams and new business priorities. Such experiences can help build adaptability, problem-solving ability and a broader understanding of the organisation.

Sharma of Vedanta also shared, “We believe leadership is built through real experiences, challenging assignments and the opportunity to step up. This is how we build an agile and future-ready leadership pipeline from within.”

By this process employees discover strengths that may not be visible in their current roles.

However, creating a culture of mobility can be difficult. One of the most persistent barriers is manager resistance.

Managers may be reluctant to release high-performing employees, particularly when teams are operating with lean resources.

Employee reluctance can present another challenge. Some employees may prefer the security of familiar roles, while others may lack confidence in taking on assignments outside their existing expertise.

Skill gaps can further limit mobility, particularly when employees are expected to move quickly into emerging areas.

Gorur said, “Organisations need to create an environment where internal movement is viewed as a positive part of career development rather than as a disruption to existing teams.”

Clear career pathways, learning opportunities, mentoring and open conversations between employees and managers can help address these barriers.

The challenges

The challenge for CHROs, therefore, is to move internal mobility from an HR programme to an organisational capability.

That requires companies to identify critical future roles, map the skills required for those roles and create multiple pathways for employees to acquire those capabilities.

Mobility also needs to be supported by managers, who must increasingly view developing and releasing talent as part of their leadership responsibility.

For organisations, the payoff can extend beyond succession planning. Internal moves can help retain institutional knowledge, improve employee engagement and reduce dependence on external hiring for roles where internal talent can be developed.

As businesses become more cross-functional and AI reshapes job responsibilities, tomorrow's leaders may increasingly be defined not by a single area of expertise but by their ability to understand the wider business, work across functions and navigate unfamiliar problems.

Internal mobility, in that context, becomes more than a talent-management mechanism. It becomes a way for companies to deliberately create the leadership experiences that their future leaders will need.

