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White Paper:
Chaos Career Progression Theory

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A Strategic Framework for Recruitment and Retention in Digital Health Transformation.

Executive Summary

The Chaos Career Progression Theory (CCPT) is a modern framework for workforce planning, introduced to TransForm Shared Service Organization in the context of digital health transformation across regional hospitals and community healthcare providers. CCPT recognizes the unpredictable and non-linear nature of career development and offers strategic insights for attracting and retaining top talent in healthcare IT. By embracing flexibility, adaptability, and continuous learning, shared service organizations can build resilient teams equipped to navigate the complexities of digital innovation.

As hospitals undergo rapid digital transformation, the demand for skilled IT professionals in healthcare continues to grow. Traditional career planning models often fall short in addressing the dynamic nature of modern work environments. CCPT offers a relevant and practical approach to workforce development, emphasizing adaptability, chance events, and non-linear career paths.

Introduction

As a not-for-profit shared services organization that provides digital health and back-office support for health service providers within Ontario, it can be a challenge to recruit and retain top talent. This can be attributed to a variety of reasons, including location, market conditions and the unique skillsets of roles typically recruited. IT in healthcare is becoming increasingly engrained in clinical workflows intended to provide more effective and efficient patient care. Digital health tools such as electronic health records, telehealth, AI-enabled diagnostics and interoperability standards are evolving quickly and require a talent pool that captures the complexities and can adapt to rapid technological change.

The conundrum lies within finding and retaining top talent in roles that are new to the healthcare space and quickly evolving. Recruitment requires moving fast but thinking faster and working in creative ways to fulfill the human resource gap within healthcare IT. At TransForm Shared Service Organization, the Chaos Career Progression Theory (CCPT) core principles have been adopted as a framework and applied to address the Canadian healthcare system which is characterized by rapid technological change, layers of governance and competing priorities.

The Chaos Career Progression Theory –
Why it works for healthcare IT

The Chaos Career Progression Theory (CCPT) is a unique model that characterizes career development as a dynamic, non-linear process that can be influenced by environmental factors. Essentially, it acknowledges that the twists and turns of life can take over more linear and hierarchal progression of career development where one studies nursing, works in nursing and continues to progress within their field. Instead, CCPT emphasizes adaptability, flexibility, openness to chance opportunities, and a keen sense of self-awareness as key skills for navigating uncertain and shifting career paths.

In the context of digital health transformation, CCPT can be applied to:

1 **Recruitment:** Attract candidates with diverse backgrounds and emphasize adaptability over rigid qualifications.

2 **Retention:** Support flexible career pathways, normalize change, and invest in continuous learning.

3 **Leadership:** Encourage leaders to model openness and share non-linear career stories.

4 **Workforce Planning:** Build talent pools and promote internal mobility based on evolving interests.

At TransForm, there is a shift with its talent pool, employing clinical professionals in IT roles and conversely, IT professionals with an understanding of clinical operations. Through the adoption of the CCPT framework, employees can expand on their skillset through stretch assignments, coaching, secondments, cross-functional projects, and a clear pathway to alternate careers within the organization through its grass-roots skills matrix tool. Use of the skills matrix tool helps to drive the development plans of those wishing to pursue alternate careers in healthcare IT by providing visibility and developing the requisite skills for these rapidly evolving roles.

Applying CCPT to IT Healthcare in Canada: Strategic Benefits

Implementing CCPT in recruitment and retention strategies offers several benefits for TransForm and similar health IT organizations:

1. Enhances agility in workforce development.
2. Fosters innovation and experimentation.
3. Improves employee engagement and satisfaction.
4. Aligns with the dynamic nature of digital transformation in healthcare.
5. Interdisciplinary intersections: Health IT sits between clinical practice, policy, and technology solutions. CCPT suggests that hybrid identities (e.g., clinician-developer, policy-oriented analyst) have higher resilience because they can navigate multiple attractors and pivot when technologies or funding priorities shift.
6. Innovation cycles and technological disruption: AI, remote monitoring, and interoperability standards can rapidly change which competencies are valued. CCPT implies that ongoing learning, small experiments, and cross-sector exposure (e.g., piloting an AI tool with a vendor) yield better long-term outcomes than static credential accumulation.

How TransForm's Skills Matrix Works:

TransForm's Skills Matrix was implemented to provide a clearer roadmap for employees regarding their development within the organization. With the skills development matrix – a grassroots tool that was developed in collaboration with leadership and employees - we now have a means to concretely identify the core and technical skills required for each of the 66+ roles within the organization. If someone wants to better understand what skills are required in another role, this tool helps to provide greater visibility. The skills matrix helps us have more meaningful conversations between the employee and their manager regarding what they are doing well and opportunities for improvement or to stretch their skills. Staff then must demonstrate how they have cultivated the requisite skills for a period of six months with coaching and feedback loops.

TransForm's Skills Matrix in Action:

Dana W. – Senior Program Coordinator, TransForm SSO

Dana began her career as an IT help desk employee for insurance quoting software for three years and learning on the job. After starting a family, Dana left her IT help desk job and wanted to balance staying home with her child while contributing to household income. In the 1990's, work from home was virtually unheard of, but Dana landed a job as a data entry clerk for personal/auto insurance. Being able to work from home part time allowed her to stay with her child and build skills related to on-line portals and the insurance industry. Once she was ready to work full-time, she became an insurance underwriter and advanced to team lead for five years, leading her to a position at a large insurance company in project management, with no formal training.

Factors that allowed her to succeed in this role included transferable skills such as organizational skills, natural leadership, an ability to determine what needs to be done, by whom, relay detailed instructions and establish relationships.

With these transferable skills, Dana applied for a position on the e-VOLVE project with TransForm – upgrading the Health Information System (HIS) at four member hospitals to Oracle Cerner – as a Business Analyst. In her interview with TransForm, Dana's skillset was recognized – organization, leadership, relationship building and ability to get things done – and she was offered a position in the Project Management Office. This position adapted to Dana's skills, and her title was Senior Project Management Analyst, filling a gap in the office that played to Dana's strengths and added strong leadership to the department.

From her success in that project role, despite limited clinical and technical skills, Dana progressed her career within TransForm to her current role and has exceled as Senior Program Coordinator, Health Information Systems, keeping project deliverables on track, and coordinating project teams.

Cassandra C. – Senior Business Analyst, TransForm SSO

Cassandra graduated with a bachelor's degree in Linguistics with the intention of becoming a speech language pathologist, providing front-line patient care. While job searching, Cassandra found the job listings for the TransForm e-VOLVE project and applied for a Project Assistant role to get her foot in the door of a health-care focused job with an interest in project management.

She was hired and assigned to the Rehabilitation work-stream of the project, working with front-line staff to gather requirements. From there, she was promoted to Project Associate, supporting the Ambulatory Care work-stream, honing project management skills such as minute taking, presenting, verbal and written skills, tracking deliverables, status updates and reports to keep her project lead on track.

With those skills, she transitioned to a Business Analyst role, still under the Ambulatory Care umbrella, but focused on requirement gathering, as well as supporting hospitals with issue management and resolution, keeping knowledge documents up to date and cross-training each other within the immediate team and departments under her direct manager's portfolio including ER, oncology, peri-operative services under the out-patient umbrella.

With the initiative to learn different functional areas and mentored by her manager and project colleagues, Cassandra was able to substantially increase her skills and knowledge, progressing to Work-Stream Lead for Oncology for Phase 4 of the e-VOLVE project. This new position was another opportunity for growth and Cassandra's ability to thrive in new situations, learn on the job, and leverage her transferable skills from her time as a project assistant helped her advance in her career with TransForm to Senior Business Analyst. She now leads projects in the Oncology workspace thanks to her own initiative and skills-stacking as she progressed in her non-linear career. She now consults with other organizations in the region and continues to learn and grow her skillset.

Summary: These two examples highlight the importance of interviewers recognizing the potential of candidates, not just formal education, but transferable skills, personality traits, adaptability and ability (willingness) to pivot and learn new skills and roles.

Key Factors for Organizations to Consider

The case studies described above underscore how non-linear career progression can help to fill niche gaps within digital health while increasing engagement and retention. Through this approach, organizations should consider the following:

1. Rethink talent pipelines. Traditional job ladders and fixed job descriptions should be complemented with modular roles, rotational opportunities and secondments across the organization and partners that intentionally create "planned happenstance."
2. Support adaptive learning. Employers and funders should invest in micro-credentials, cross-disciplinary mentoring, and paid time for exploratory projects. These interventions increase the diversification of professionals.
3. Design local capacity-building through secondments and knowledge-transfer activities to help retain institutional memory and enable career continuity.
4. Measure different outcomes. Instead of promotion rates alone, measure network centrality, cross-functiondal mobility, and the ability to lead successful pilots — metrics aligned with CCPT's value on adaptability and emergent impact.
5. Provide clear visibility into the skills required with consistent verbiage for the roles within the organization. Provide meaningful career development plans that align with the skillsets required for alternate careers within the organization to increase engagement and retention.

To effectively leverage CCPT, TransForm:

1. Integrates CCPT principles into job descriptions and recruitment campaigns.
2. Offers flexible career development programs and mentorship
3. Facilitates cross-functional collaboration, training and project-based roles.
4. Provides training on adaptability and change management.

Conclusion

The Chaos Career Progression Theory (CCPT) reflects the real day-to-day experience of IT professionals in Canadian healthcare. Careers in this sector rarely move in a straight line — new technologies emerge constantly, roles shift across jurisdictions, and opportunities often arise unexpectedly – right person, right place, right time are all critical factors contributing to the support of the CCP Theory. CCPT helps individuals make sense of this reality by encouraging them to build diverse skills, stay adaptable, and be ready to take advantage of unplanned opportunities when they arise.

For health IT organizations, CCPT offers a roadmap for creating a more resilient and innovative workforce. Strategies like flexible job design, cross-functional training, and procurement practices that strengthen local capability all contribute to a healthier talent pipeline.

TransForm has already shown how CCPT can succeed in practice. By embracing flexible role structures, supporting continuous learning, and encouraging employees to explore emerging opportunities, TransForm has built a workforce that is more agile, more engaged, and better prepared for rapid change.
Ultimately, adopting CCPT doesn't replace traditional career planning — it enhances it. It gives both individuals and organizations a practical framework for thriving in an unpredictable environment, rather than simply reacting to it.

The Chaos Career Progression Theory provides a forward-thinking framework for managing talent in the evolving landscape of healthcare IT. By embracing the principles of CCPT and utilizing the Skills Matrix effectively, organizations like TransForm can attract, retain and empower professionals who thrive in complexity – ultimately driving successful digital health transformation across hospital systems.

Meet Michelle Watters

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Michelle Watters joined the TransForm team in October 2013, bringing with her a deep passion for people and a commitment to helping them reach their full potential. She is dedicated to fostering a supportive, collaborative workplace culture where individuals thrive.

Before joining TransForm, Michelle served as Chief Operating Officer and Executive Director of AUTO21, a national automotive research initiative funded by the federal government. Earlier in her career, she spent nine years with National Health Partners/ KMG Health Partners in Toronto and in the United Kingdom, where she held the role of Senior Manager of Disability Services.

Michelle holds two Master's degrees (Science and Education Administration) and is a Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Professional (Fellow), Certified Transferable Skills Analysis and Registered Rehabilitation Professional.

Michelle is also a committed community leader. She has served on the boards of the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, St. Clair College, and the University of Windsor Alumni Association. Additionally, she was a tribunal member for the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal (WSIAT) and has co-authored peer-reviewed academic papers on experiential education in post-secondary institutions.

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