

Career Mapping Toolkit

Empowering career progression for IT teams

Toolkit Contributors



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Paul was Director of Information Systems Services at Lancaster University from 2013 to 2022. Paul sponsored the Lancaster University 'IT Job Track' project that forms the foundations of this toolkit. Paul is a former Vice Chair of UCISA.



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Chris works at Lancaster University as Head of Digital Change and Innovation. As a member of the IT Leadership, he led on the delivery of the IT Job Track project which produced the resources of this toolkit.



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Executive Summary

It can be difficult for individual IT staff to understand routes for personal career progression. During the early stage of an IT career, individuals may develop interests outside their area of activity. For example, a helpdesk worker may develop an interest in project management, or an IT technician may wish to develop their skills in computer networking. Alternatively, as the IT field rapidly evolves, more experienced staff may wish to change direction. A developer may wish to become an architect, for example. The environment of university organisations and processes may also result in staff feeling that their options for progression are limited resulting in low satisfaction, poor performance or employee drain.

UCISA recognised the vital importance of university IT staff in its Strategic Plan 2022-27 which aims *to enable the professional development of individuals and enhance the collective expertise of our community.*

This UCISA Career Mapping Toolkit provides resources to encourage and facilitate career progression for IT staff. It is based on the 'job track' methodology developed by Lancaster University and provides an approach to the development of job families tailored to the needs of a university IT department. Specifically, it focuses on the difference between 'skills and knowledge' and 'breadth and complexity to provide a number of indicative 'job tracks' akin to an underground route map. It is intended to be simpler than more comprehensive approaches such as SFIA (the global skills and competency framework for the digital world - <https://sfia-online.org/en>) and can operate alongside existing role analysis frameworks such as the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) framework - <http://ecc-com.mysmarterwebsite.co.uk/how-we-can-help/hera-and-fedra-the-sectors-leading-role-analysis->

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What's in the toolkit?

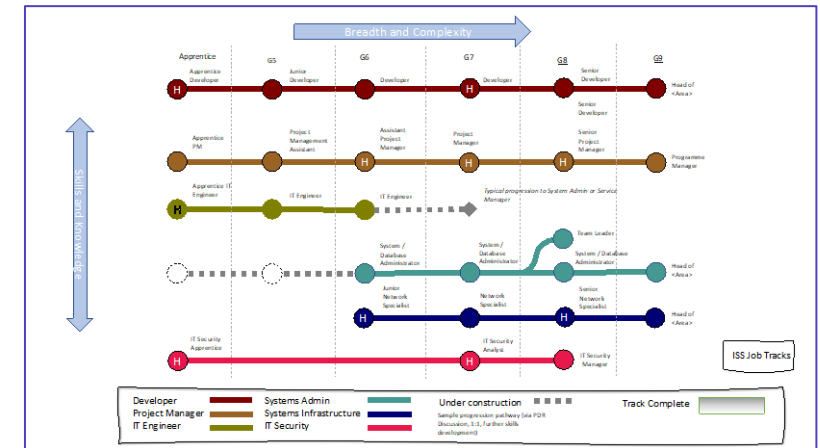
This toolkit is intended to be adapted by other institutions and includes resources to enable IT managers to work effectively with members of their teams to plan their progression routes as part of normal business such as regular one to one catch ups or as part of annual performance development reviews.

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The toolkit includes:

- Quick start guide
- Background to the Lancaster approach
- Advice and guidance on how to assess and rationalise job descriptions in a systematic way
- Example language ladders and language matrix
- Database of job descriptions and person specifications
- Case study examples
- Communications resources including draft presentations
- Visualisation of key job tracks in the style of an underground route map

Creating each track



Quick Start Guide

The resources in this toolkit provide you with a practical way to start a Career Mapping Project in your institution. Exactly how long your project will take, will depend on several factors:

- 1. Do you have the backing of your CIO/IT director and their leadership team?** *Getting top down and visible commitment will be essential for the success of the project.*
- 2. Are you working in partnership with your Human Resources team?** *It is strongly recommended that career mapping is a partnership between IT and HR. The resources in the toolkit may challenge current thinking and practices in both areas, so it makes sense to work together.*
- 3. Do you understand how IT staff perceive opportunities for career development and progression?** *If not, then maybe you would wish to run a pulse survey, or workshops to take a*

‘temperature test’ and benchmark your starting position.

- 4. What is the quality of your current database of job descriptions (JD) and person specifications (PS)?** *This is a really important factor to consider. Do you have standard JD/PS across each broad area of expertise (e.g. developers) or do you have specifically tailored JD/PS for each individual role? If it is the latter, then you are likely to have more work to do!*

Once you have answered the above questions, you can get started. The outline below assumes that you will undertake the work as a traditional IT project, but you may want to adapt this depending on how you run projects, and how much ‘process’ you feel you need in your organisation.

- 1. Identity a Project Sponsor** – *this might be your CIO, or someone senior in your IT leadership team.*

- 2. Identify a Project Manager** - *to coordinate the work*
- 3. Identify a lead HR person to work with the Project Manager** – *this could be your HR Partner if you have one.*
- 4. Agree how you will report and monitor progress on your project** – *this might be directly through your IT leadership team, or as a separate Project Board.*
- 5. Put in place appropriate project documentation as you require** – *by answering the questions earlier in this section, you should have an idea of what your mandate is, so the next step would be to flesh out a Project Initiation Document and outline plan.*

- 6. Get started!**



Background and Lancaster Approach

A survey of IT staff at Lancaster University in 2018 indicated a perception that there were inconsistent opportunities for career progression. The IT leadership team investigated further and determined that there was:

- Lack of clarity on routes to career progression – the difference between academic promotion and career progression for professional staff was not well understood.
- Inconsistency in approach across teams, with some areas taking advantage of secondment and job shadowing approaches more than others.
- Inconsistency in use of language across job descriptions and person specifications, leading to unintended restrictions on essential job requirements, limiting the internal application pool.
- Complexity in recruitment processes, involving

potentially excessive review of job descriptions and person specifications as part of the HERA process.

- Insufficient use of apprentice roles to onboard new talent.

The Leadership Team also identified several examples of good practice including innovative job shadowing in some areas, and some attempts to standardise job descriptions. Overall, however, it determined that work was required to improve processes to maximise career development opportunities for IT staff.

Some members of the Leadership Team had had previous experience implementing SFIA and similar job family approaches in both HE and commercial settings. It was agreed that such approaches had potential to be overly bureaucratic, and as such a more pragmatic route was required. It was also deemed important that the approach would

complement the HERA job evaluation scheme used at Lancaster, and not require extensive re-work.

Although reviewing and consolidating a large number of job descriptions and person specifications is not a small task, the overall aim was to be pragmatic, minimise bureaucracy, and stay focused on delivering resources for staff that were easy to understand.

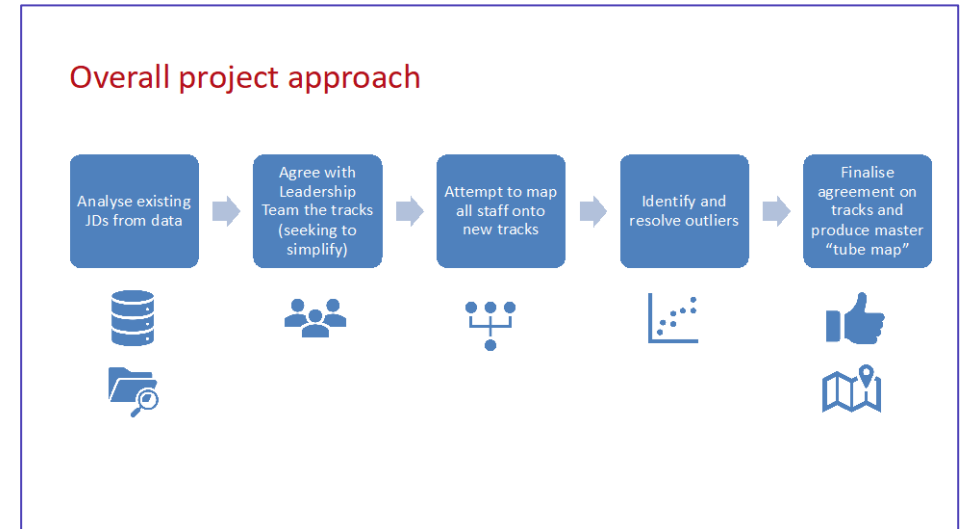


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Lancaster Aims

The Lancaster Job Track Project had the following core aims:

1. To address concerns raised through our IT staff survey on perceptions of career development and progression.
2. To take a consultative approach, aiming to create ambition for career progression across the whole department.
3. To develop tools and resources to be used in manager / person conversations and particularly as part of annual performance development reviews to illustrate routes for career progression.
4. To undertake case studies of good practice.
5. To be as simple as possible. Working in partnership with HR colleagues taking a pragmatic approach to simplify and reduce the number of job descriptions and person specifications.
6. To remain consistent with our job evaluation framework (HERA) and minimise any need for job re-evaluation.
7. To NOT mandate new job descriptions or person specifications for existing staff, but hopefully staff would see the benefits of moving to them as the scheme is deployed.

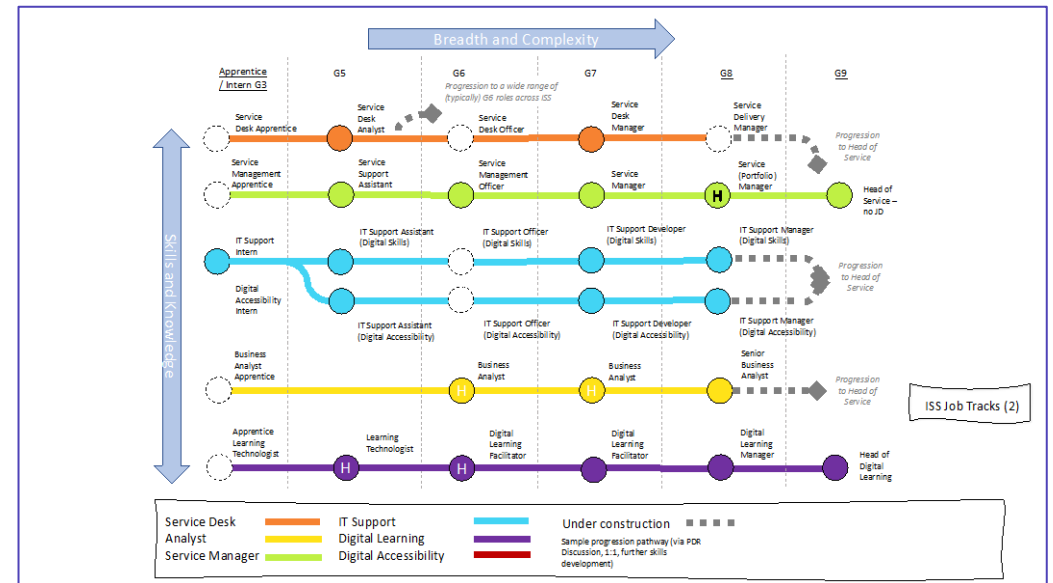
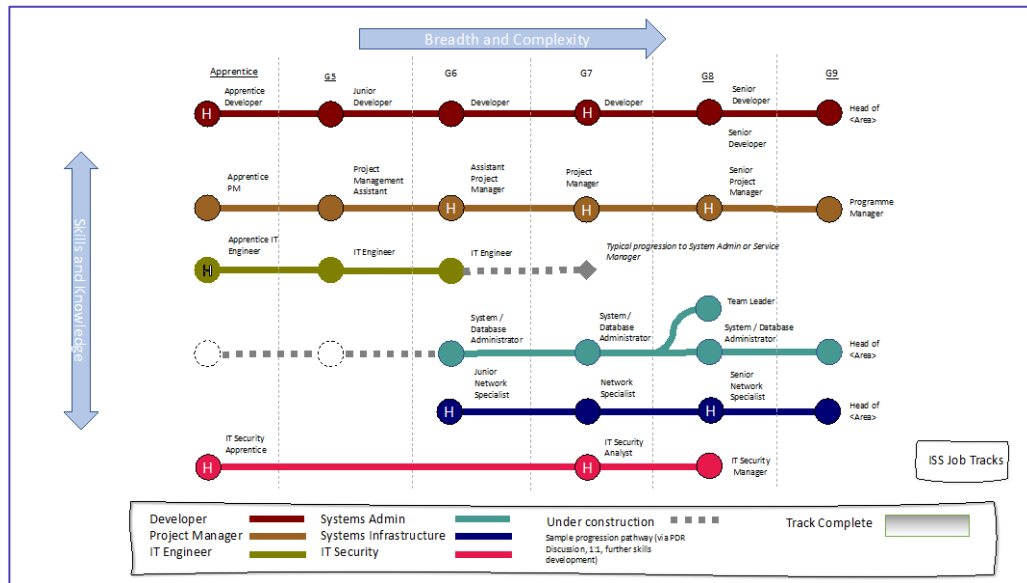


Outcomes of the Lancaster Project

The project identified around 140 job descriptions/person specifications. This equated to almost one for each person in the department (!), with no clear structure and many inconsistencies.

Principles for Job Descriptions, Person Specifications and Advertisements were agreed, utilising language ladders and template statements. In partnership with HR colleagues, job descriptions were developed ensuring that the language mapped onto HERA.

This resulted in less than 50 roles (including some new apprenticeship roles), which were structured across 11 pathways or 'job tracks' (see diagram). Specific nuances of a role would be expanded in an advertisement. There is HERA audit traceability for all posts, with a job library available for staff to use.

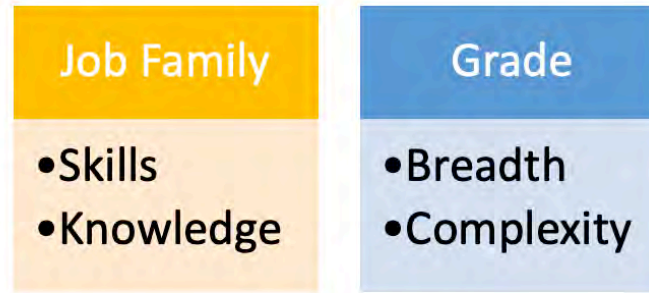


Adapting for your institution

This toolkit includes comprehensive resources to enable you to adapt the Lancaster approach and build job tracks for your institution. In addition to this document, you will find extensive resources in the downloadable file CM-Toolkit.zip.

Before you dive in and start creating your own job tracks, you will need to understand some key concepts and also the use of language ladders and the role of the language matrix.

The next few slides take you through these at a high level. You will then be ready to work through the rest of the material in the Zip file.



| | Job Description | Person Specification | Advert |
|---------------|---|---|--|
| Means | A concise written statement, explaining the major requirements of a role. Can be quite generic | Explains the type of person and the breadth and complexity of skills and knowledge required to undertake a role | An attractive and clear description of the job role and wider context with the purpose to attract people to apply |
| Lists out | Job title, duties, tasks and responsibilities involved in a job | Qualifications, experience, skills and abilities | Information about the department, university and role specifics |
| What is it | It expresses a description of the work an employee will do if selected | It expresses what an applicant must possess to be selected | It expresses a marketing led view of the job description and person specification with other relevant information |
| Prepared from | Job analysis | Job description / Language Matrix | Sample adverts, description of wider university / department |
| Describes | Roles | People doing the roles | Why someone would want to come and take the role |

| | Low | Medium | High |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Problem Solving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solves routine problems effectively Escalates problems beyond their scope | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributes to group problem solving Looks beyond obvious solutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiently solves complex problems with wide scope Identifies or anticipates hidden cross group problems |
| Performance Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keeps manager informed of progress Works independently and seeks coaching from manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manages dependencies through coordination Develops measurable goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivers feedback that improves performance Develops measurable goals and delegates effectively |
| Drive for Results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes responsibility for and is proud of achieving results Demonstrates strong work ethic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defines assignments by results to be achieved Works efficiently and diligently to do an excellent job | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holds people accountable for meeting commitments Sets high standards and expects successful achievement |
| Creativity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pushes themselves to think beyond the obvious Contributes new ideas and approaches to how their work is done | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly provides high quality thinking to idea development Challenges standard approaches to find more effective ways | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brings out creativity in others Entertains wide-ranging possibilities to generate new, innovative ideas |
| Dealing with Ambiguity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performs ambiguous tasks with guidance and support Adapts to changing circumstances direction and strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't need things to be black and white Makes decisions without sufficient information for certainty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refuses to be paralyzed by uncertainty or ambiguity Ready and ready switches gears in response to unanticipated circumstances |
| Innovation Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjusts to changes in priorities and technology with minimal direction Recognises good creative ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivates others to find new ways of using and looking at technology Nurtures good creative ideas in self and others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Champions good creative ideas Anticipates and responds to changes in high level strategies |

| <Job Track Name> | Job title (Grade) | Job title (Grade) | Job title (Grade) | Job title (Grade) | Job title (Grade) | Job title (Grade) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med | High |
| Problem Solving | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med | High |
| Performance Management | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med |
| Drive for Results | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med | Med |
| Creativity | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med | High |
| Dealing with Ambiguity | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med |
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| Strategic Thinking | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med |
| Negotiation and Conflict Management | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Interpersonal Skills | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med |
| Hiring and Staffing | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med |
| Building Team Spirit | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Communication Skills | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med |

Key concept 1

Key Concept 1 – Skills and Knowledge vs Breadth and Complexity

The key concept of the job track approach is the difference between the breadth and complexity of a role (which ultimately defines the grade of a post), and the skills and knowledge required to undertake the role (which define the associated job family).

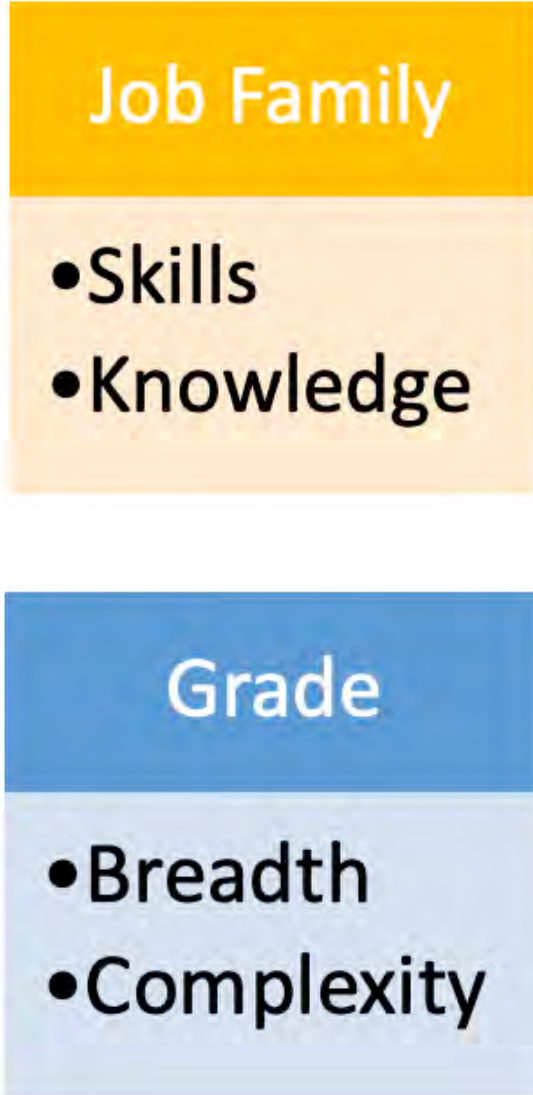
Example: The Case of the Disadvantaged Developer

A developer needs to have the skills and knowledge to understand specifications and write code. These skills define the ‘developer’ job family. The actual grade of a developer role is defined by the breadth and complexity that is required. A junior developer may, for example, be expected to write code based on straightforward specifications. A Senior Developer may be expected to have a broader understanding of the

code base/architecture and make more strategic decisions on how to implement a solution based on more complex specifications.

As part of the investigation at Lancaster, it was determined that a developer in one team was inadvertently unable to apply for a more senior developer role in another team. The role had been specified with too much focus on the skills required (a specific programming language) than the breadth and knowledge required for the more senior post. Someone with the breadth and knowledge to undertake a more senior role would be able to learn a new programming language (skill).

In reviewing job descriptions and person specification, it is essential that the distinction between ‘skills and knowledge’ and ‘breadth and complexity’ are understood.



Key concept 2

Key Concept 2 – Job Descriptions, Person Specifications and Advertisements

To rationalise the overall number of job descriptions (JDs) and person specifications (PSs), it is important to agree what each document does, and to consider the role of the advertisement. There is a balance to be achieved in the level of detail in JD/PS documents, but **the general principle should be to make these relatively generic**. This will reduce the number of different JD/PSs required, and any specific nuances can be drawn out in the advertisement.

| | Job Description | Person Specification | Advert |
|---------------|---|---|--|
| Means | A concise written statement, explaining the major requirements of a role. Can be quite generic | Explains the type of person and the breadth and complexity of skills and knowledge required to undertake a role | An attractive and clear description of the job role and wider context with the purpose to attract people to apply |
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Example Language Ladders

The **language ladder** is a simple way to describe competencies required for a job (e.g. Problem Solving, Creativity etc) in terms of low, medium and high categories. This can then be used to help the development the **language matrix** for each grade in a job track (see next page). This simple approach to competencies complements, rather than directly links, to a formal framework like SFIA or HERA. By taking this more pragmatic approach your job tracks can be developed with minimal impact on your organisations existing job evaluation framework.

| | Low | Medium | High | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|-----|--------|------|---------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|--|--|-----------------------------|--|--|---|----------------------------|---|--|---|-----------------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
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Language Matrix Template

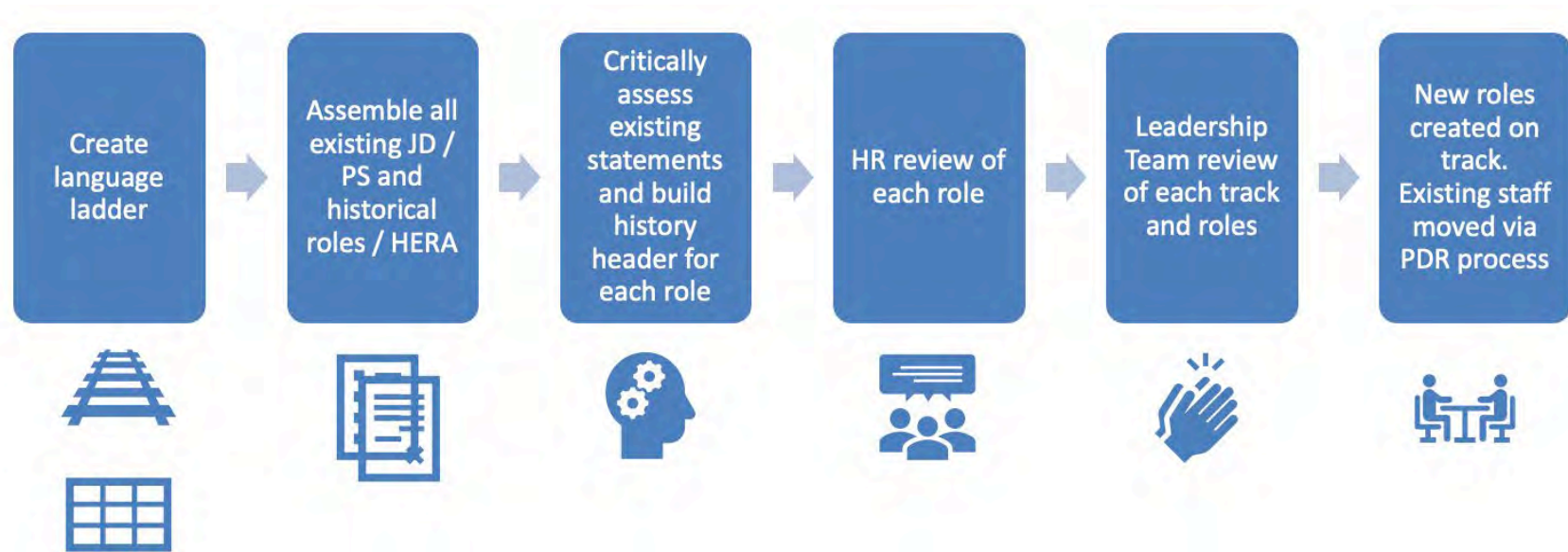
Based on an agreed **Language Ladder** (which applies to the whole organisation), a **Language matrix** is developed for **each job track** to define breadth and complexity for each grade. The toolkit includes example matrices from job tracks developed at Lancaster.

| <Job Track Name> | Job Title (Grade) | Job Title (Grade) | Job Title (Grade) | Job Title (Grade) | Job Title (Grade) | Job Title (Grade) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Problem Solving | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med | High |
| Performance Management | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med |
| Drive for Results | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med | Med |
| Creativity | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med | High |
| Dealing with Ambiguity | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med |
| Innovation Management | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med |
| Strategic Thinking | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med |
| Negotiation and Conflict Management | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Interpersonal Skills | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med |
| Hiring and Staffing | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med |
| Building Team Spirit | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low | Low |
| Communication Skills | Low | Low | Low | Low | Med | Med |

KEY POINT: By comparing job tracks you can see where an individual may wish to develop to prepare for a potential grade change, or or even moving from one track to another.

Creating a job track

The Toolkit resource file includes a detailed process for creating a job track with example language ladders and other resources.



Tips and tricks:

- In our case we found that: System Development Officer, Technical developer, Developer, Systems Analyst / Developer were all actually a “Developer”
- There were many discussions on the specifics. For example: What is the difference between a Network Administrator and Systems Administrator?
- It’s essential to do the mapping for ALL IT staff, but it’s suggested that you start with an area you feel most comfortable with.
- There will be “funny roles” that have strange titles. In our case this was for Security, and this ultimately led to a separate track that was not envisaged at the start.
- Do a draft map FIRST, as this allows better discussion and can be refined as individual job tracks emerge from the process.

Toolkit Resources

As part of this toolkit, you should also download file CM-Toolkit.zip. This contains a host of resources as described below.

Process Folder

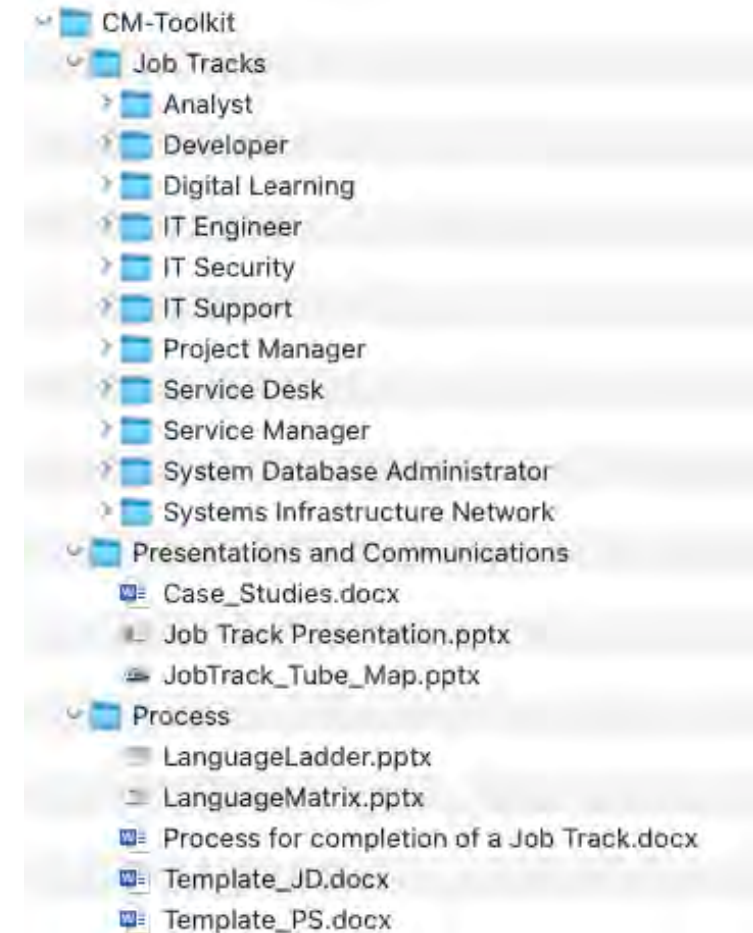
- **START HERE !!** - Process for completion of Job Track (Process for completion of a Job Track.docx)
- Language Ladder (LanguageLadder.pptx)
- Language Matrix template (LanguageMatrix.pptx)
- Template Job Description (Template_JD.docx)
- Template Person Specification (Template_PS.docx)

Job Tracks Folder - Each track as a separate sub-folder as follows:

- Analyst
- Developer
- Digital Learning
- IT Engineer
- IT Security
- IT Support
- Project Manager
- Service Desk
- Service Manager
- System Database Administrator
- Systems Infrastructure Network

Presentations and Communications

- Case Studies
- Job Track Tube Map (JobTrack_Tube_Map.pptx)
- ISS Job Tracks Presentation (ISS Job Tracks - The story so far.pptx)



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