

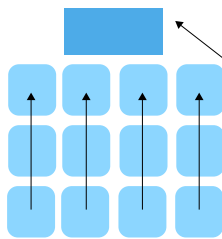


# NAVIGATING CAREER GROWTH IN THE CLINICAL LABORATORY: Ladders & Lattices

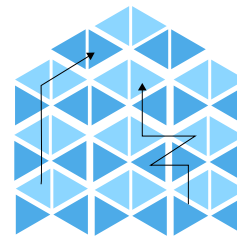
Career ladders have been widely adopted in the clinical laboratory to support ongoing professional development and staff retention. However, relying on a career ladder alone for professional growth can be limiting. Ladders assume employees will stay in one department indefinitely, that all careers will progress in an identical fashion, and create a hierarchical culture. Ladders tend to be rigid and limit skill transfer across the work silos. While career ladders do offer a clear and structured path for advancement, they may not fully support the diverse needs and aspirations of the modern workforce.

Enter the career lattice. Career lattices are a professional development model that recognize vertical, lateral, or diagonal career mobility, creating flexibility for individuals to chart their own growth based on their life stage, personal goals, or the needs of the organization. As their careers grow, employees build cross-functional relationships, skills, and expertise, which benefits both the individual and the institution.

## CAREER LADDER



## CAREER LATTICE



Traditional, linear path of upward progression through series of predefined roles

Flexible approach to career development with lateral movement across roles as well as upward progression

Emphasis on hierarchy

Emphasis on skill diversification

Focus on deepening expertise in one area

Focus on broadening skills, adaptability

Promotion based on tenure and experience

Promotion based on cross-functional expertise and experience

### Career Satisfaction

Outlays a clear path, but possibly limiting to those seeking varied experiences

A “choose your own path” model could be overwhelming to some, while others seeking diverse learning opportunities may feel empowered.

### Example

Example: MLT → MLS 1 → MLS 2 → Supervisor

Example: MLT → MLS 1 → Quality Assurance Specialist → Training and Development Lead → MLS Program Director

### Organizational impact

Stable workforce with specific expertise

Versatile workforce capable of adapting to change, challenging status quo



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## How have some laboratories integrated the concept of a career lattice?

### Case Study 1

Wan Yung began working in a core laboratory as a Medical Laboratory Scientist 1 (MLS 1) and was subsequently promoted to Medical Laboratory Scientist 2 and 3 (MLS 2, MLS 3) as she gained deeper expertise in hematology and clinical chemistry. Seeking a more regular work schedule, she made a lateral transition to a Point-of-Care Specialist role seven years later, and eventually she rose to the role of Point-of-Care System Supervisor. After building a strong point of care program across her hospital network and developing a strong team, she was ready for her next challenge. She transitioned to work in leadership in Anatomic Pathology, where she is able to leverage her network of contacts across the hospital to support her new division. While there was a steep learning curve to understand AP operations, she is also able to bring a fresh perspective to the team.

### Case Study 2

Linda's career began in the microbiology laboratory as an entry level medical laboratory scientist. Over 8 years, as she developed her skills in the lab, she progressed up the medical laboratory scientist (MLS) career ladder. When a Laboratory Supervisor position opened up in the lab, she applied and was offered the role. She gained experience working with human resources, supply chain, and other hospital departments. After the birth of her first child, she made a lateral transition to work as an Analyst for the hospital's infection prevention and control team. This allows the hospital to retain her talent, and it allows her to continue growing professionally.

### Takeaways

In the clinical laboratory, there is a role for both career ladders and lattices. As seen in these examples, career ladders are a tool for staff professional development and retention that recognize high performing, experienced staff with higher compensation and a different title. They support development of deep technical expertise. Career lattices add flexibility to the system for individuals who seek new challenges outside their technical silo. Lattices support retention of high talent individuals who have unusual skill sets, or who face different pressures balancing home and work.

In the modern healthcare environment, interdisciplinary and interprofessional communication is critical to delivering high quality, effective and efficient care. The career lattice helps nurture, recognize, and grow individuals with unique skill sets and cross-functional expertise. By integrating both career lattices and ladders, clinical laboratories can foster a dynamic workforce that benefits from both specialized expertise and broad-ranging skills, ultimately enhancing both individual career satisfaction and organizational success.