

Career Times Three

Not every ambitious employee dreams of becoming a manager in the classical sense. Bayer Technology Services therefore offers two alternative career path options to climb to top positions: as experts or as project managers.



At first glance Professor Andreas Schuppert and Dr. Daniel Leineweber are two people who could not be more different. As a teenager Schuppert was already fascinated by astronomy and quietly experimented in his own small chemistry lab. At the age of 16 he won the state physics prize in “Jugend forscht”, a popular research competition for young pupils in Germany. He applied for his first patent at the age of 18.

By contrast, Leineweber already started engaging his teachers in eloquent debates at a young age. From the beginning he preferred working in a team – and especially when the task had to be completed under extreme time pressure, for example, as the editor responsible for a youth magazine.

Despite all these differences in personality, what Schuppert and Leineweber have in common is that they both work for Bayer Technology Services in Leverkusen. And as yet neither one has fitted into a typical career mold at the company. “Professional advancement at Bayer Technology Services has long been synonymous with the management career path, which is the approach of the classical manager,” says

Professor Andreas Schuppert offers unique know-how in his field. At Bayer Technology Services he is a so-called Key Expert for industrial mathematics and has a professorship for data-driven modeling in Computational Engineering Science at the RWTH Aachen University.

INTERVIEW

STRENGTHENING STRENGTHS – THAT’S GOOD!

In conversation with Professor Andreas Schuppert

You are a so-called Key Expert. Is the status of an expert for someone with your education unusual?

It is not the standard case for people with my educational background. Someone who studied a scientific or engineering discipline and joins a large company usually changes jobs after a few years. He or she then gives up the specialist job and works in production, marketing or controlling. In a way, they are widening their competencies, instead of deepening them – and are then more

Astrid Geißler, Head of Human Resources. And therein lies the problem.

Employees who pursue the management career path specifically want to take on personnel responsibility and to manage increasingly more people as their career progresses. They hope to actively help shape the organization and, if possible, ultimately influence the company strategy.

While this vision might excite some people, it may just elicit a shrug from others. “Some employees are keen to climb the career ladder, but do not see themselves as classical managers because personnel responsibility doesn’t interest them,” Astrid Geißler explains. For example, there are some people who prefer being involved in a particular field of expertise, such as industrial mathematician Andreas Schuppert. But then there are others who would rather work in a team and on different projects, such as engineer Daniel Leineweber. In the past Bayer Technology Services has never been able to offer such employees a fixed career path. There were no personnel development measures for their professional careers, no specific support for their competencies and therefore few medium- or long-term possibilities for advancement.

All this has changed since the summer of 2010, when the “perspective” career model was introduced in the company. More than just a mere change, it has virtually revolutionized career opportunities! Now two completely new career path options are offered in addition to the classical one. In terms of prestige and remuneration as well as prospects for promotion, they are in no way inferior to the classical management approach: the expert career path and the project career path.

The expert career path is ideal for people like Andreas Schuppert who want to acquire highly unique and specialized knowledge in a particular field and to use this in a customer-oriented or practice-oriented fashion. In contrast, the project career path targets people like Daniel Leineweber, who are particularly strong in planning and coordinating and who specifically want to work on projects. “Both groups can now progress along clearly defined and consistent career paths to the top positions of upper management with the respective personnel development measures,” says Astrid Geißler full of enthusiasm. “This approach is unique in the Bayer Group.”

The core of this new career concept is the so-called development dialogue, in which employees analyze, together with



Project Manager Dr. Daniel Leineweber helps companies optimize their processes. At the same time he acts as an expert in training employees of the Bayer subgroups.

their superior, their strengths and preferences. They are then classified in one of the three career paths and in a “role” (see box on page 12). “The assessment is transparent and based on objective principles,” Geißler stresses. Their superiors are bound to clear rules. In the course of their career, the classification is regularly adjusted to the devel-

likely to pursue a management career or a career as a project manager.

How did you end up choosing the expert career path?

The combination of science and applying it to practice has always fascinated and accompanied me in my career. As part of its Excellence Initiative, a new professorship was created at the RWTH Aachen University in 2008 for a qualified expert from industry, and I took on the position. This was the same time the

company started to consider the expert career path, and they fit together well. I now spend two days a week in Aachen and three in Leverkusen. That would not be compatible with a management position.

Is that detrimental for you?

Not at all. I see myself as a mediator between the academic community and an innovative company. It’s a pioneering role in Germany and extremely exciting!





“People who enjoy working for Bayer Technology Services because they feel valued are a guarantee for success with customers.”

Astrid Geißler, Bayer Technology Services

Three Paths to the Top

MANAGEMENT CAREER PATH	PROJECT CAREER PATH	EXPERT CAREER PATH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Takes on personnel responsibility ● Ability to inspire others and to lead them to a goal ● Team orientation, good communication skills and natural assumption of responsibility ● Leader personality and trusted reference person for one’s own team ● Talent for entrepreneurial thinking and acting, for strategic foresight and for creating pragmatic solutions that are specifically delegated ● GOALS: utilize management competencies ● ROLES: Head of Competence Center – Department Head 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Takes on project responsibility ● Enthusiasm for various project requirements and complex tasks ● Interest in planning and coordinating projects as well as a command of the necessary resource management skills ● Talent for professional and comprehensive management of interdisciplinary projects ● Communication strengths, competencies in target-oriented work under time pressure, pragmatic problem solving and quick decisions ● GOALS: utilize supervision competencies and coordination strengths ● ROLES: Specialist/Engineer – Lead Engineer, Team Leader, Project Manager – Senior Project Manager – Program Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Takes on functional responsibility ● Fascination for technical details and background ● Interest in concentrated work on a team of experts and in exchange on an expert panel ● Makes use of scientific research results to search for practice-oriented solutions ● GOALS: expand highly specialized knowledge and utilize it for a customer-oriented and practice-oriented approach ● ROLES: Specialist/Engineer – Expert – Senior Expert – Key Expert

opment of the employees. The company also actively helps employees expand their competencies, for instance, through seminars or other advanced training measures.

At the moment most employees are pursuing the project career path, says Geißler. But this classification is not written in stone. “We work with people, and people change.” A

move between the career types is therefore generally possible and even desirable because it sharpens the competencies. “And the areas of responsibility can also overlap – especially at the beginning of a career.”

So, the employee may theoretically be classified in a particular career path, but in practice work in two, such as Dan-

What characterizes an expert and an expert career path in comparison with a project career path and a management career path?

The expert’s job involves answering non-standard questions that have never been solved before. That differs from management responsibilities or the duties in project management.

How so?

The challenge of the tasks in a management career path is to

manage a high degree of complexity. The manager knows what he or she has to do for every single task. In project management, the specialist knows how to manage a project. The challenge is how to handle coincidences or disturbances. The expert has to deal with completely unstructured problems – questions in which it is totally uncertain how one should resolve them.

Is a scientist more likely to be suited for an expert career path?

iel Leineweber. The engineer's everyday work revolves around the subject of operational excellence. The 45-year-old advises Bayer companies and external customers on how to improve their processes – from better product quality to more efficient procedures in production.

Leineweber is a project manager in the true sense of the word. He is a good communicator, thinks analytically and is very customer-oriented in his approach. Constant variations in his everyday work do not bother him. And he always remains calm under time pressure. Nevertheless, he is also an expert in the sense of his career path, and his current position allows him to enjoy both sides.

As a specialist Leineweber conducts schooling with an internal SIX-SIGMA training program for employees of the Bayer subgroups as part of the so-called Operational Excellence Academy. At the same time he manages various projects that involve making production processes as efficient as possible. The double role proves beneficial for him nearly every day. "To achieve an improvement by turning the right screw, you need the know-how of the expert. But you have to be able to inspire people and motivate them for the necessary changes as well." In this case the customer service and communication skills of a project manager are in demand.

Iris Prasser is currently vacillating between two career paths as well – she too embodies both the expert and the project manager. As Lead Engineer Piping the 42-year-old contributes her expertise to the planning and construction of complex piping systems. She also coordinates the associated tasks – many times in international projects – and assumes the technical management role in the team. She obviously enjoys this double role. "Officially, I am classified as an expert, but I also see myself very firmly in the project career path," she says. By fostering her strengths she can combine both.

For Astrid Geißler the career model stands for a clear win-win situation. Obviously, the employee benefits, but so does the company because it can optimally utilize a person's potential. "People who enjoy working for Bayer Technology Services because they feel valued are a guarantee for success with customers because they seem especially convincing."

The career model is also a trump card in the search for new qualified personnel. After all, the company hires profession-



As Lead Engineer Piping, Iris Prasser plans and coordinates complex piping systems. She contributes her highly specialized expertise, in addition to her project manager skills.

als for the entire Group. "Already during the job interview, we have to be able to show an applicant his or her career opportunities. A candidate is only going to choose us if he or she sees the company as an attractive employer who values and cultivates his or her know-how. And that is the exact same reason someone stays with us!"

Scientists are often people who enjoy solving extremely difficult problems, which include, in particular, major challenges of the future where you want to be the pioneer. This is usually not compatible with a normal career for which there are relatively clear predetermined paths.

Does the career model convince you?

For an innovative company like Bayer, it is extremely important that every employee has the maximal opportunities to contrib-

ute his or her capabilities. This career model offers a lot more flexibility. In former times many companies preferred to cultivate the "generalists", rather than fostering individual strengths. Today, everyone should have the chance to come to the point where he or she can make use of his or her own personal strengths. So, you strengthen the strengths and see to it that any weaknesses are compensated. This is beneficial for the company – and the employee.