



## Succession Planning – The Quick Read

Success planning is the process for identifying and developing staff to take on future key roles with an organisation, normally to ensure that there are people ready to take over those roles when the person currently undertaking leaves. These roles may be leadership positions, business critical positions, or roles that will become more necessary in the future as result of planned or expected change. Succession planning is part of workforce planning – ensuring you have the right skills at the right time.

To be effective, succession planning must be aligned to the future strategy and direction of the organisation, developing talent for that direction.

Succession planning can focus on short term and long term requirements.

Effective succession planning will reduce the risk to an organisation of key individuals leaving and the loss of knowledge that results, as there should be a potential successor on the path to taking over the role.

There are many ways to approach succession planning, and it varies from organisation to organisation. Some larger organisations have very structured approaches to succession planning, where successors are identified and then formally developed to take on posts in the future. Other organisations take a broader approach, and seek to develop a range of relevant skills and experience across the organisation that would equip a pool of people for future opportunities.

In order to identify potential successors to key roles, there is also a mix of formal and informal practices. The starting point is always to identify what are the key roles for the future – and what skills and experience they will require. Some organisations also look at the

competencies and behaviour that would be required too. This can be particularly challenging in fast moving industries where the future is hard to predict, and skills may change over time.

Once the roles and skills are identified, organisations typically assess existing staff against them, considering both current performance and future potential, and use this information to identify potential individuals for these key roles. There are many ways to do this too; some organisations use specific models whereas others use performance data or even assessment centres. Whichever approach is taken, it is important to ensure transparency, consistency and fairness. Any assessments of candidates must be objective.

Finally, formal development plans are put in place to support the individual in addressing any gaps and getting ready for possible new roles.

Development activities within succession planning could include:

- Secondments / sideways moves to gain experience in different business areas
- Mentoring from more experienced staff
- Formal learning and training / qualifications
- Coaching
- Job shadowing
- Provision of specific work experience, eg an opportunity to work on particular projects.

Succession planning can lead to a few problems. First of all, succession planning only focuses on internal talent, and it can be possible to rely too much on internal recruitment as this may limit the introduction of new ideas and approaches to the organisation learnt elsewhere. There is of course no guarantee when or even if these new roles will materialise. This could lead to frustration on the part of those who have received development and who want to move on in their careers – and if opportunities aren't available they could choose to take that knowledge elsewhere. However, succession planning (and the development that it includes) can support employee engagement and encourage some employee to stay if they feel that that have a future in the organisation.

There may be occasions where organisations feel that they need to bring in external talent as part of succession planning, recruiting for future roles or to fulfil predicted roles. A balance of internal and external talent can be considered a good option to bringing in new ideas whilst retaining and motivating existing staff.

