

The nuts and bolts of succession planning

Most managers know that talented people are hard to find. If managers try to replace current employees, they often find that recruiting comparably qualified employees from outside the company may cost much more than keeping current employees.



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Succession planning is about filling the organisation's talent pipeline and building internal strength. It is about leveraging the talent that the organisation already possesses by developing its full potential; but how is succession planning different from replacement planning?

Succession planning is identifying critical management positions, starting at the levels of project manager and supervisor and extending up to the highest position in the organisation. Although it is often confused with replacement planning, succession planning goes one step further as its focus is broader than one position, department or division. It also differs from replacement planning because successors are considered by level on the organisation chart. A talent pool is identified underneath each level with the goal to prepare as many successors as possible - these individuals need to be at least 80% ready for promotion to any position at the next level on the organisation chart.

Dale Carnegie Training offers seven essential elements of effective succession planning in an organisation:

- **Step 1: Get commitment:** No succession planning programme can work without managers and employees at all levels having a clear understanding of why a succession programme is needed. Employees at all levels need to understand their role in the programme;
- **Step 2: Analyse the work and the people now:** To prepare successors, managers need sufficient knowledge of what work needs to be done, how it is being done and what people do it best. This step requires the creation of up-to-date job descriptions, clear work outputs and accountabilities as well as job competency models to describe the characteristics of the people who do the work best;

- **Step 3: Evaluate performance:** This is the process of planning, managing and appraising worker performance over time. This step is the key to a good succession planning programme. The performance management system must measure people against what they are expected to do, what results they are expected to achieve, and what competencies and behaviours they are expected to demonstrate;
- **Step 4: Analyse the work and people needed in the future:** Decision makers align the organisation's strategic objectives with the work and competencies needed to realise those objectives. The organisation's future requirements should be driven down to each level, job and function and the result should be implemented into future job descriptions;
- **Step 5: Evaluate potential:** The potential for promotion to higher level of responsibilities should be considered against the backdrop of the future. Things are changing as individuals are developing - it is not enough to assume that successful performance in the past will guarantee successful performance going forward. Organisational leaders must find objective ways to determine how well individuals will function at a future time and at a higher level of responsibility;
- **Step 6: Develop people:** Focus on closing developmental gaps by comparing the results of steps four and five. To carry out this step successfully, organisational leaders should establish an individual development plan (IDP) for each employee to narrow gaps between what the individual does now and what he must do, successfully, in the future; and
- **Step 7: Evaluate programme results:** The results of a succession planning programme can be evaluated by measuring programme success against the objectives established for the programme.

"Since succession planning focuses on, internally, developing employees, it is usually necessary to devote more time and attention to planned training, on-the-job development, and other experiences designed to build competencies. Succession planning is a step forward in securing not only the future of your organisation, but of your employee's skillsets too. A promising approach is to integrate top-down succession planning, in which managers identify possible future leaders," said Neville de Lucia, New Business Development Director of Dale Carnegie Training.

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