

Notes on Succession Planning

Guiding Principles

- Succession planning is not the same as replacement planning; at its best, it involves a broader set of development activities that are directed at whole classes of employees—ideally ALL employees.
- The organization benefits when as many people in it as possible aspire to career advancement and engage in developmental activities as a result of the succession planning initiative.

What Succession Planning Initiatives Can Look Like

The *Leadership Institute* is a succession planning initiative created by the IDD field to prepare managers for succession into senior positions which will be vacated as baby-boomers retire in the coming years. The Institute provides a week of learning about leadership at three levels: in the field, in organizations, and regarding participants' own leadership skills, with the objective of infusing the field with talent—now over 400 graduates—that will be more ready for assuming increasingly responsible leadership roles. This model is a collective one, where several entities have gotten together to sponsor preparation for succession that they hope will benefit the field as a whole, in time.

Succession planning doesn't have to be a big, expensive investment, however. A few years ago, the *Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL)* put in place a succession planning process. At that time, CQL had about 35 full time employees. In CQL's program, seven high performing individuals went through a year of development—one three-day foundational session, three two-day sessions, and on-the-job developmental opportunities. For example, participants in the program began attending the regular senior management team meetings so they would develop greater awareness of how the organization is run and how it interacts with its environment. Also, each participant was assigned (with mutual enthusiasm) a senior manager to serve as a mentor. The following year, four more people from the pool of prospective leaders took part in a second running of the development program, thereby giving everyone who had expressed an interest—almost a third of the organization—a chance to take part in leadership development.

Ideas for Developing a Succession Planning Initiative

1. **Generate a compelling case** for succession planning; help everyone, especially your organization's leaders, see succession planning as an imperative. Succession planning will have costs and inconveniences and it will require sustained support.
2. **Establish a representative steering team** to guide the program development, implementation, and evaluation—include people from all levels and all parts of the organization. Ensure that the expertise exists on the steering team to enable it to do an effective job; provide training to the team so that all members have a solid grounding in best practices in both teambuilding and succession planning.

3. ***Create a participative process*** for developing core competencies, whether the targeted competencies are for management or staff positions; for example: conduct interviews, surveys, or focus groups; find ways to draw in the whole organization.
4. ***Put out the call*** in your organization to determine the level of interest and define the marketing that will be needed in order to generate support for a succession planning initiative. The goal is to spread interest and, ultimately participation, as widely as possible in the targeted population.
5. ***Identify job-based learning opportunities*** as an integral part of the succession planning program. In most workplaces there are more learning opportunities available in the work itself than could ever be found in training or education programs. Create such learning experiences as developmental assignments, special issue task forces or teams, job rotations, job sharing, cross training. Acting assignments in particular, offer the chance for people to experience and practice working in a very different job or a job at the next level.
6. ***Develop a mentoring component*** of the succession planning initiative and train the mentors. In this way, senior managers have a leadership development experience of their own and develop interest in and support for the succession planning initiative. It is important to support the mentoring relationships—for example by: convening mentors and people being mentored, providing tools for mentoring, and recognizing mentors' efforts in the organization's performance management system.
7. ***Establish a process for individual planning***, which asks supervisors to sit with each employee and discuss the employee's developmental interests, the needs of the organization, the skills gap they may identify, and the ideas for what the individual can do to strengthen his or skills. Such a process will be most valuable if it is supported on an ongoing basis to help the supervisor and employees continue their dialogue about both skill and career development.
8. ***As positions open up, select people from within*** except where the required skill set is unmistakably missing in the current pool of eligibles—by unmistakable is meant that virtually everyone would agree that the skill set is a) required in the job, and b) not resident at the targeted level in the organization. The objective is to assure employees that the succession planning initiative is truly being conducted in good faith.

Engagement and Motivation

Tenet—The more involved people are in making the decisions associated with their work, the more motivated they become to carry out the work with commitment and confidence.

→ Increased involvement in decisions about the work →

<i>Hear about a decision after the fact</i>	<i>Get advance notice about a decision before it's implemented</i>	<i>Provide input to implement- tation plan for the decision</i>	<i>Provide input to the decision before it's drafted</i>	<i>Serve on team to draft decision options</i>	<i>Make or be part of making the decision</i>
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→ Increased motivation to do the work →

<i>I don't care that much about the work I do; I just want to get by and stay out of trouble</i>	<i>I see a need for the work I do and I see the value of my contribution to the organization</i>	<i>I want to do my best, make a contribution and support others here to do the same</i>
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