

Succession Planning Guide & Template

HOW TO PROTECT CONTINUITY, DEVELOP FUTURE
LEADERS, & REDUCE BUSINESS RISK



Introduction

Succession planning is not about predicting who will leave it's about ensuring your business is never vulnerable when change happens. In fast-moving organisations, particularly across real estate, construction, and professional services, the impact of an unplanned departure can be significant.

When critical knowledge, leadership, or decision-making capability sits with one individual, continuity is at risk. A strong succession plan creates clarity, resilience, and confidence. It ensures that when roles evolve, leaders move on, or unexpected change occurs, the business continues to perform without disruption.

This guide outlines a practical, modern approach to succession planning focused on people, capability, and long-term sustainability.

What Succession Planning Really Is (and Isn't)

01

Succession planning is the process of:

- Identifying critical roles
- Understanding future capability requirements
- Preparing people to step into greater responsibility over time

It is not:

- A replacement plan only for senior leaders
- A reactive response to resignations
- A one-off HR exercise
- A closed-door conversation limited to the board

When done well, succession planning supports growth, retention, and engagement – not just risk mitigation.

Why Succession Planning Matters More Than Ever

02

Organisations without succession planning often face:

- Disruption when key people leave
- Delayed decision-making
- Loss of institutional knowledge
- Increased hiring pressure
- Reduced confidence among teams & stakeholders

By contrast, organisations with clear succession plans:

- Develop internal talent intentionally
- Reduce dependency on external hiring
- Retain high-potential employees
- Build leadership capability early
- Strengthen long-term resilience

Succession planning is a strategic advantage.

03

Common Succession Planning Mistakes

Many organisations struggle with succession planning because they:

- Only focus on C-suite or executive roles
- Confuse performance with potential
- Avoid honest conversations about readiness
- Fail to link succession planning to development
- Rely on assumptions rather than evidence
- Treat succession as confidential rather than transparent

The result is often a plan that looks good on paper but fails in practice.

Identifying *Critical Roles*

04

Not every role requires a formal succession plan.

Focus on roles that:

- Have a significant impact on business continuity
- Hold specialist or hard-to-replace knowledge
- Carry leadership, commercial, or strategic responsibility
- Would be difficult or time-consuming to replace externally

As organisations grow, these roles may change – succession planning should evolve alongside the business.

05

Identifying *Future Successors*

Effective succession planning looks beyond job titles and tenure.

Potential successors are often identified through a combination of:

- Consistent performance
- Learning agility and adaptability
- Leadership behaviours
- Values alignment
- Ability to operate beyond their current role

High potential does not always mean immediate readiness – and that distinction matters.

Performance vs *Potential*

06

One of the most common pitfalls in succession planning is assuming that strong performers are automatically future leaders.

Succession decisions should consider:

- Performance – delivery in the current role
- Potential – ability to grow, adapt, and lead at a higher level

Clear differentiation helps organisations invest in the right development pathways and avoid misaligned promotions.

07

Linking Succession Planning to *Development*

Succession planning only works when it is connected to development.

Once potential successors are identified:

- Capability gaps should be clearly defined
- Development plans should be realistic and structured
- Progress should be reviewed regularly

Development may include:

- Stretch assignments
- Cross-functional exposure
- Mentoring or coaching
- Leadership training
- Increased responsibility over time

This ensures readiness is built, not assumed.

08

Emergency vs Long-Term *Succession Planning*

Strong organisations plan for both.

Emergency Succession

Addresses unexpected departures and ensures:

- Interim responsibility is clear
- Critical decisions can continue
- Communication is managed effectively

Long-Term Succession

Focuses on:

- Leadership pipelines
- Planned transitions
- Business growth and evolution

Both are essential — and should be documented.

Transparency and Communication

While not every detail needs to be shared, employees should understand:

- That succession planning exists
- How development and progression decisions are made
- What skills and behaviours are valued for future leadership

Transparency builds trust and engagement.

Reviewing and Maintaining Succession Plans

Succession planning is not static.

Plans should be reviewed:

- Annually
- When the business strategy changes
- When roles evolve
- When individuals develop faster or slower than expected


Regular review ensures succession planning remains aligned with reality.

Succession Planning *Template*

To support this guide, we've created a set of practical succession planning templates designed to help employers move from intention to action.

These templates help organisations:

- Identify critical roles
- Map potential successors
- Assess readiness and risk
- Link succession planning to development
- Maintain clarity during both planned and unplanned transitions

 [Download the Succession Planning Templates](#)

How to Use the Succession Planning Template

1. *Start With Critical Roles*

Begin by identifying the roles that would present the greatest risk to the business if left vacant.

Focus on roles that:

- Are critical to delivery, revenue, or decision-making
- Hold specialist knowledge or leadership responsibility
- Would be difficult or time-consuming to replace

Avoid trying to cover every role — clarity comes from prioritisation.

2. *Identify Potential Successors*

For each critical role, list potential successors, whether internal or external.

When identifying successors, consider:

- Current performance
- Learning agility and adaptability
- Leadership behaviours
- Values alignment

Be clear on whether individuals are ready now, or will require development over time.

3. Assess Readiness and Risk

Use the readiness and risk sections to create a realistic snapshot of your current position.

Ask:

- How ready is the successor to step in if required?
- What level of disruption would the business face if the role became vacant?
- Is interim cover available?

This step helps leadership teams understand where the biggest vulnerabilities sit.

4. Link Succession to Development

Succession planning only works when it is connected to action.

Use the development section to capture:

- Strengths to build on
- Capability gaps to address
- Practical development actions such as mentoring, stretch assignments, or training

This ensures succession planning supports growth, not assumption.

5. Capture Leadership Observations

Use the leadership notes section to record:

- Key discussion points
- Concerns or dependencies
- Decisions agreed

This keeps conversations aligned and avoids reliance on memory or informal follow-up.

6. Review Regularly

Succession planning is not static.

Review the framework:

- At least annually
- When roles or responsibilities change
- Following organisational growth or restructuring
- After leadership or senior team changes

Regular review ensures the framework remains relevant and accurate.

Final Thoughts

Succession planning is not about predicting the future — it's about being ready for it. When organisations invest in clear succession planning, they reduce risk, retain talent, and build confidence at every level of the business. They move from reactive decision-making to intentional leadership development.

Strong succession planning protects today's performance while preparing for tomorrow's growth.

Because the most resilient organisations aren't those that avoid change — they're the ones prepared for it.