

Succession Planning is the backbone of any organisation

Author: Newturn Wikirefu . February 2020

It is a matter of regret that most organisations regard succession planning as a disaster recovery tool rather than a development tool. According to Rodwell (2001), succession planning is the deliberate and systematic effort by an organisation to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future and encourage individual development.

Rodwell (2001), further argued that the origin of succession planning has to be credited to the French pioneer of management history, Henri Fayol (1841-1925). According to Fayol (1918), the strength of an organisation lies within its people and when people become more skilled and prepared the organisation benefits. Bill George (2003), the former CEO of Medtronic has this to say “One of the most important things leaders cannot afford to ignore is to prepare for their own succession”. According to Rothwell,(2005), successful succession planning processes should be rooted in the strategy of your organisation. In concurrence with Rothwell, Cadmus (2006), strongly argues that succession planning should start with a clear vision and strategic plan. Rothwell (2005), further purported that boards of multi-billion corporations identified succession planning as a critical issue facing corporations, third in ranking after financial achievement and strategic planning.

2. Why your organisation should have a succession planning strategy?

- It ensures effective leadership development
- It preserves organisational knowledge and intellectual capital
- It helps you to identify and select the best-fit candidates for key roles
- It leads to organisational stability since its absence leads to organisational instability
- It provides an avenue to develop talent and retain experienced employees
- It reduces the need for expensive recruitment
- It reduces new staff learning curve errors
- It can be used as a vehicle to communicate the values and beliefs among employees about what is needed to be promoted

What are the key elements of Succession Planning?

According to the research done by Rothwell and Conger (2004), there are ten fundamental facets of succession planning and these include among other things:

- Articulation of expectations via organisational commitment
- The process should be transparent
- Assessment of organisational needs
- Establishment of knowledge, skills and abilities
- Assessment of individual talent

- Development of individual growth plans
- Individual feedback
- Accountability
- Evaluation of the process
- Integration of the process throughout the organisation

1. What steps do you need to follow when developing a succession plan?

1. Collection of Data

- Conduct an audit of the existing positions and current performance levels
- Identification and prediction of future leadership positions which are critical to your business
- Alignment of your succession planning to the business strategy
- An appreciation of existing leadership strengths and interests

1. Building the Success Profile

This involves the establishment of job families and identification of competencies for each job family.

1. Nominate the Successors

Select the succession candidates for each critical role using scientifically proven methods like

- Psychometric Tests
- Assessment Centres
- 360 Degree Assessment
- Personality Assessment

1. Assess Development Needs

After an assessment of the skills that potential successors possess and do not possess, it is imperative to develop individual development plans to bridge the skills gaps identified.

1. Develop Succession Development Paths

Upon identification of the skills deficiencies among the potential successors, the next step is to develop succession development paths to address the gaps identified.

1. Develop an Implementation and Sustainability Plan

This phase involves the development of actions, time frame and resources needed to bridge the identified gaps. This stage also involves the development of a communication and change plan.

In the light of the above discussion, I would like to urge those organisations which are lagging behind in

terms of their succession planning to revisit their drawing board and design an effective succession plan aligned to their overall business strategy.

Source : Rothwell, W. (2002), “Putting success into your succession planning”, Journal of Business Strategy, Vol. 23 No. 3, p. 32

Newturn Wikirefu is the Talent Acquisition Manager at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm.

Phone +263 4 481946-48/481950/2900276/2900966 or cell number 0784597343

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