

Building Leaders

How do leaders really develop?

Succession planning is not solely about critical roles that need to be filled. It's about the successful development of high potentials in terms of functional competencies, leadership competencies, and navigating the company culture.

The Harvard Business Review article, *Developing Your Leadership Pipeline* written by Jay A. Conger and Robert M. Fulmer noted “the fundamental rule is that succession management must be a flexible system oriented toward developmental activities, not a rigid list of high-potential employees and the slots they might fill. By marrying succession planning and leadership development, you get the best of both: attention to the skills required for senior management positions along with an educational system that can help managers develop those skills.”



Some companies go through the motions of succession planning to provide the appearance of building a succession pipeline. However, in reality it's an inefficient and labor intensive task that does little to support the development of successors.

Practices of Development

The following five best practices for developing succession candidates (from the Institute for Corporate Productivity) are a helpful guide in building high-impact development plans.

1. **Align Competencies**
Organizations should have a clear idea of their objectives to determine which competencies are critical and how to develop those in each successor
2. **Give Candidates the Performance Feedback They Need**
All can benefit from a combination of objective performance metrics and comprehensive guidance from experienced leaders
3. **Make Sure Succession Plans Are Well Integrated**
A succession plan should be integrated into other talent management processes and systems, from performance management to recruitment to compensation
4. **Customize Training and Development as Needed**
Development practices such as coaching, mentoring, stretch assignments, performance goals and the like should take into consideration an individual's unique abilities and interests as well as the cultural consistencies needed throughout the organization

5. Provide Transparency

Talent development needs to be clear enough that promotion and succession planning decisions are based on merit rather than favoritism even with the latitude of some degree of subjectivity

Learning by Doing

When developing leaders it is important to know how adults learn. We primarily learn by doing. In fact, there is a 70-20-10 model of learning that should be applied to your leadership development efforts. This model suggests that 70% of what is learned comes from completing real work, 20% is learned through mentoring or coaching from others, and 10% of our learning comes from formal training in the classroom, seminars, e-learning, conferences, readings, etc.

As you look back at your own development, I'm sure you can point to roles, assignments, and experiences that were most meaningful in your growth as a professional and as a leader. In the development of your leaders be sure to include the assignments and experiences that are critical to true applied learning and development.

Development Across the Enterprise

Although development is highly individualized, there are programs and processes that should be core to developing the collective capabilities of professionals and leaders in your company. Key components of an enterprise-wide talent development system include:

- Rotational assignments
- Developmental stretch roles
- Targeted assessment and feedback – including self-insight tools such as 360's
- Formal mentoring and coaching
- High Potential and/or Future Leader Development programs
- Employee development profiles (individual development plans)
- E-learning or enrollment in corporate university programs

Metrics

Metrics are important as they point to the health of the overall talent pipeline and point our efforts on roles and people that are critical to success of the company. Identification of the "readiness level" for each participant will assist in guiding the program frequency and timing. Typical readiness stages or levels include Ready Now, Ready in 6 months to a year, 1-2 years, and 2 years or more. It is suggested that an organization should have at least 2 people in each stage, for each pivotal role. This data should feed into a workforce planning initiative, which is a best practice for top performing companies.

In Summary

Succession planning needs to emphasize those roles deemed critical to the company. A best practice is to identify the leadership competencies required of those roles now, and more

importantly in the future. Then put in meaningful development for each individual through enterprise-wide programs with associated metrics.

Incorporating these practices and critical components will create a framework to build your future leaders and ensure your company success is never constrained by a lack of talent.

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