

WHY GOVERNMENTS NEED TO RAMP UP SUCCESSION PLANNING

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Every day in the United States, 10,000 people turn 65. And according to the Pew Research Center, millennials now outnumber baby boomers in the workplace, 76 million to 75 million, while millennials will make up 75 percent of the workforce just 10 years from now.

As a result of the rapidly aging workforce, government organizations -- small and large, rural and urban -- are experiencing a brain drain that is placing their organizations at a critical juncture: The need for experienced and seasoned employees has never been greater, yet those are the very workers who are most likely to be departing in the very near future. It's clear that governments need to get serious about succession planning.

Small organizations are particularly challenged when an employee departs, since a natural successor may not already be within the workforce. That problem may not be as much of an issue for mid-sized and large organizations, but a wave of retirements can still disrupt service delivery. And even in larger organizations, it's a challenge to replace a sole incumbent who handles a breadth of responsibilities or possesses extensive specialized knowledge.

Beyond simply replacing positions that become vacant, effective succession planning is an ongoing process of identifying, assessing and developing talent to ensure leadership, management and supervisory continuity throughout an organization and, moreover, to sustain its performance. The major focus is that replacements are prepared to fill key vacancies on short notice and that individuals have the development capacity to assume greater responsibilities and exercise increased technical proficiency and expanded management roles.

Succession planning is about a lot more than just increasing employee training. Nor should it be the exclusive responsibility of the human-resources department. Effective succession planning requires advocacy and visible support by all members of the executive leadership team. A well-designed succession-planning program will enable an organization to align workforce requirements directly to strategic and operational plans; identify and implement strategies to transition from the existing workforce to the one that will be needed; and build the capability to continually shape the workforce to respond to emerging trends, shifting priorities and technological change.

Establishing systematic succession planning can entail a culture change. It can be a major shift in an organization where decision-makers may have been accustomed to filling one vacancy at a time. It requires commitment to a longer-term strategic view of talent needs, and doing it will bring a number of benefits:

- Identifying the bench strength that is in place will help departments and divisions meet both long-term and emergency leadership, management and non-supervisory needs.
- It sends a positive message throughout the workforce. Promoting people is good for morale, and promoting from within encourages people to take on responsibility, assume risk and grow through their achievements.
- The organization will have a clearer sense of the strengths of internal candidates, enabling more informed selection and promotion decisions.

Effective succession planning in government is an ongoing, dynamic process, not a static, one-time objective. It not only empowers employees to achieve their professional goals but also supports organizational goals. It's essential in today's competition for talent.



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