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# LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAREERS AND WORKFORCE

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## THE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO

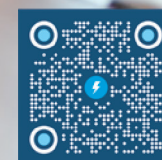
# LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUCCESSION PLANNING

The time for succession  
planning in your organization  
is now, like right now!

BY PATRICK IBARRA

Many forward-looking organizations are pursuing comprehensive and systematic succession planning to ensure that they can lose seasoned, knowledgeable employees without experiencing a disruption in service delivery. More than just training employees, succession planning is about both developing talent inside the organization and implementing ways to recruit more qualified candidates to join the organization. Furthermore, succession planning is not simply replacing positions that become vacant; it's a dynamic process (and not an event) of aligning employee aspirations and talents with the constantly evolving needs of the organization and providing employees with the resources and support they need to grow into new roles.





Learn more about the webinar, "Succession Planning: The Time is Right Now!"

In its most impactful form, succession planning influences how people across the organization think about performance, potential, job assignments, career paths, staffing decisions, and employee development. In short, it ensures the continued effective performance of your organization by establishing a process to identify, select and manage talent and build bench strength.

I prepared many of the previous paragraphs for my article, "Succession Planning: An Idea Whose Time Has Come," published in the January 2005 edition of *PM*. Nineteen years later, here we are, and succession planning is as mission critical as ever. The most significant changes since 2005 are the composition and size of the workforce. In 2005, succession planning became popular because it was a way to effectively mitigate the pending retirement of baby boomers that was beginning to occur. Nowadays, that retirement

wave continues but the kicker is that young(er) employees have different motivations than previous generations and the size of the workforce is declining.

The decrease of Americans' labor force participation is nothing new—fewer and fewer Americans have been participating in the labor force for decades, resulting in a smaller workforce that is expected to continue shrinking for years to come. The U.S. unemployment rate in January 2005 was 5.3%. In November 2023, it was 3.9% and trends show the competition for attracting, retaining, and developing talent will become even more fierce. The U.S. economy has shifted from more people than jobs to more jobs than people which, based on the numbers, will continue into the foreseeable future.

The role of local government is to serve as the facilitator, or advocate, for an improved quality of life for residents who volunteer to live in your

community. Maintaining a well-prepared, modern workforce is vital to ensuring your agency's continuity of operations. In principle, succession planning is similar to a risk management strategy because what delivers services is qualified, mission-oriented people motivated to build a stronger community.

Identifying and developing the best people for key leadership/management/supervisory roles is basic to future organizational success. To ensure that success is indeed continued, organizational leaders like yourself:

- Need the excellent performance in their organizations preserved, if not enhanced.
- Need to identify important high-level positions.
- Want to strengthen individual advancement.
- Want to have the right leaders and managers prepared for the right positions at the needed time.

Your organization currently has an approach to succession

planning, but it is likely not systematic and replicable, thereby the results are not sustainable. Improving (or simply maintaining) workforce productivity requires you and your leaders to accept that the work environment has changed, and your approach to succession planning must change as well.

Today, succession planning requires more than just a chart that shows who holds what job within your organization. Gold standard organizations use succession planning to develop and maintain strong leadership and to ensure that they address all the capabilities required for today's and tomorrow's work environment.

I fully recognize that there is an endless series of often-conflicting priorities that you have to navigate to keep your community vibrant. Over the years, I've had the good fortune of traveling across the United States and Canada partnering with numerous local governments on succession

planning, speaking about it at scores of conferences, authoring several articles, and presenting webinars (which, by the way, I'll be presenting an ICMA-sponsored webinar on succession planning on March 12— learn more via the QR code on the opposite page). Yet I continue to discover those leaders who still are talking about it but not acting on it. My question is when does having a capable, mission-oriented workforce become and stay a top priority despite the other forces pushing and pulling the agenda? Remember: it's not equipment, facilities, and computers that deliver your services, but capable, mission-oriented employees who choose every day to make a difference.

Investing in succession planning isn't about you creating a new line item in your budget or for that matter, even about spending more dollars on it. It is about making sure the capabilities of your workforce are a top priority and sustaining that commitment despite other forces.

In this article, I implore you that the time for talk about succession planning is over. Now is the time to adopt and implement a systematic and comprehensive approach to building a strong, capable bench of potential successors.

### The Ever-So-Clear Crystal Ball

According to the 2022-23 SHRM State of the Workplace Report,<sup>1</sup> there was consensus among human resources professionals in their rankings of the four most serious issues facing their organization:

1. Lack of qualified candidates.
2. Uncompetitive compensation.

3. Limited workplace flexibility.

4. Lack of paths to career advancement.

The survey also asked U.S. employees what they believed their organizations should prioritize in 2023, which is a different question than the one asked of HR professionals and executives. The good news is that organizations are prioritizing the issues of greatest concern to employees. Specifically, talent recruitment, talent retention, and employee morale and engagement are top of mind for both. Ask yourself what your employees believe your organization should prioritize in 2024?

Additionally, there are a number of trends occurring from the rapidly changing workforce and workplace:

### Technological Change

- The explosion of artificial intelligence and its many uses that are becoming more evident.
- New technologies that replace human labor, threatening employment (such as driverless trucks).
- New technologies that augment or supplement human labor (e.g., robots in health care).
- Sudden technology-based shifts in customer needs result in new business models, new ways of working, or faster product innovation.
- Technology-enabled opportunities to monetize free services (such as Amazon web services) or underutilized assets (such as personal consumption data).

### Growing Demand for Skills

- General increase in the skills, technical knowledge, and

formal education required to perform work.

- Growing shortage of workers with the skills for rapidly evolving jobs.

### Changing Employee Expectations

- Increased popularity of flexible, self-directed forms of work that allow better work-life balance, or as some people refer to it, life-work balance.
- A more widespread desire for work with a purpose and opportunities to influence the way it is delivered (e.g., greater team autonomy).

### Shifting Labor Demographics

- Globally, more people are over the age of 65 than under five for the first time; in the United States, more people are older than 60 than under 18.
- Each day, 10,000 people turn 65 years of age. According to the Pew Research Center, for the first time, millennials now outnumber baby boomers in the workplace 76 million to 75 million. Millennials comprise one-third of the current workforce at 53.5 million; and by 2025, they will make up 75% of the workforce.
- The millennial generation has different work motivations and expectations for greater work/life balance.
- Only 8% of government employees are under the age of 30 (referred to as Gen Z) and, with an aging government workforce looking toward retirement or transitioning to the private sector, that number needs to go up fast to meet increasing demands.
- Younger adults who work

in government care about their communities. Gen Z, similar to millennials, are a generation that gets loud about political issues and those issues motivate them in everything, from what they buy, where they go to school, and what career they ultimately aim for.<sup>2</sup> Working in the public sector is often driven by the belief in an agency's given mission or the chance to become a part of something bigger than themselves.

### Transitioning Work Models

- Even before the pandemic, remote work was increasing. Full remote or hybrid arrangements will continue and be a difference maker for a burgeoning segment of the workforce.

**Change isn't the dangerous thing, stability is.**

- Growth of contingent forms of work (such as on-call workers, temp workers, and contractors).
- Freelancing and labor-sharing platforms that provide access to talent.
- Delivery of work through complex partner ecosystems (involving multiple industries, geographies, and organizations of different sizes) rather than within a single organization.

## Evolving Business Environment

- New regulation aimed at controlling technology use (e.g., “robot taxes”).
- Regulatory changes that affect wage levels, either directly (such as minimum wages or Social Security entitlements) or indirectly (such as more public income assistance or universal basic income).
- Regulatory shifts affecting cross-border flow of goods, services, and capital.
- Greater economic and political volatility as members of society feel left behind.

Organizations face a profoundly changing framework for the workforce, the workplace, and the world of work. These shifts have changed the procedures for practically every organizational people practice, from recruiting to learning to the definition of work itself. As the portfolio of your organization’s services evolves along with accompanying delivery methods, the jobs and skills of your employees will need to change, so attracting and developing the right people becomes more crucial than ever.

The questions you should be asking yourself:

- How will we succeed with talent?
- How strong is our “bench” to fill unexpected, or even anticipated, vacancies in key positions?
- What services and support are we providing those currently serving in supervisory, management, and leadership roles to help them successfully cope with the seemingly ever-shifting

demands they have to contend with?

- How modern is our approach to attracting, retaining, and developing our talent?
- When a vacancy occurs, do we have a proven approach to select a successor?
- How will we develop the type of leaders and talent we need?

More than ever before, human resource challenges are strategic. The most important organizational needs for leaders to address are focused on future workforce development and growth, which are critical to near- and long-term organizational effectiveness. They must be able to provide answers to this key strategic question: how can we attract, develop, and retain the top talent we need to meet organizational goals?

## The What of Succession Planning

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

from all members of the executive leadership team.

A well-designed succession planning program will enable your organization to:

- Align workforce requirements directly to strategic and operational plans.
- Recognize that succession planning includes all supervisory/management/leadership positions and not just department directors.
- Determine “at-risk” positions that are the focal point for building talent pools of potential successors.
- Improve recruitment and selection practices to “hire in” top talent.
- Identify and implement gap closing/reduction strategies (e.g., training/learning, mentoring, coaching, etc.).
- Implement a purposeful and practical approach to knowledge transfer to repurpose tacit knowledge prior to employees departing the organization.
- Build an internal succession planning capability to continually shape the workforce in response to emerging trends, shifting priorities, and technological progress.

All of this adds to the fact that in order to create a modern workforce you need a modern approach. Maintaining a contemporary workforce must be an organization-wide imperative.

Employees leave jobs for a number of reasons and not just because of retirement. These reasons can include lifestyle, unhealthy work culture/environment, few promotional opportunities, lack of investment by their employer in their capabilities, below-market compensation,

**What got you here won't get you there.**

ineffective managers, and poor leaders. The end result of all this is for you to revise your point of view, recognizing that succession planning is beyond simply dealing with the retirement of your workforce, and realize that your employees leave due to a range of factors. I encourage you to review your turnover data for the last year or so and obtain the average age of those employees who left. My estimate, based on my consulting work with a number of government agencies, is it’s likely somewhere in the low 40s.

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 departures 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.

Succession planning can be a sensitive issue in that it includes some people and excludes others. Challenging the assumption that “seniority translates to competence,” succession planning is not about preselecting employees or playing favorites when it comes to promoting employees. What it is, in

**Change before you have to rather than because you have to.**





fact, is an effort to increase the likelihood that current members of your workforce will be competitive when promotional opportunities occur and to ensure the pipeline of talent is abundant with qualified candidates. After all, the overall purpose is for your organization to (continue to) execute its mission, so consider succession planning as a tool to ensure the continuity of service delivery.

A wider definition of succession planning should also include the following:

- Ensuring that the people who join the organization are compatible with the fit required to be successful. While not all may be interested in pursuing a promotion at some point, a sufficient number should be willing to invest their time, effort, and energy to position themselves for those opportunities.
- Making sure that there are enough suitable people to

step into any significant role as it becomes vacant or is created.

- Motivating and developing them to adapt to the new role as fast as possible with minimum disruption.
- Recognizing that roles and their incumbents are constantly evolving.

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 (i.e., replacement planning). It requires commitment to a longer-term strategic view of talent needs. There are a number of valuable benefits, such as the following:

1. Having your identified bench strength in place will help the organization meet both long-term and emergency leadership, management, and non-supervisory needs at all levels.

2. Your organization maintains continuity of operations with minimal disruption from departing seasoned employees who take with them high-value tacit knowledge.
3. It allows the organization to create a standard for the qualifications and competencies that future leaders and managers need to have if they are going to lead the organization into the future. It also offers senior management a structured way to review and guide the potential leadership talent in the organization.
4. Succession planning benefits the employee by improving his or her understanding of the potential career paths available and the development he or she needs to move along those paths. This leads to improved retention, morale, and commitment of the workforce.
5. The caliber of the talent pipeline joining the

organization is consistent with the “fit” of your preferred workplace culture.

6. Gold standard organizations do not designate the responsibility for developing people as strictly the purview of human resources. They spread that responsibility across all departments and share it with department directors and line managers.
7. Growing your own sends a positive message throughout your workforce. People will want to join and stay with your organization since it develops its own people. And promoting from within is consistent with an empowerment philosophy that encourages people to take on responsibility, assume risk, and grow through their achievements.
8. The organization will have a clearer sense of an internal candidate’s strengths and opportunities for improvement, as well as access to more and better data on that person’s performance, than you would with outside candidates. Therefore, you will be able to make more informed and accurate selection decisions.
9. It allows your organization to move away from the reactive/replacement practice of hiring and toward a proactive approach of developing a talent pool through succession planning. Most public-sector organizations practice what is known as replacement hiring instead of succession planning. Replacement hiring is a reactive process to fill an immediate need, whereas succession planning is proactive and works to address the need before it exists. Figure 1 demonstrates

Figure 1. The Difference Between Replacement Hiring and Succession Planning

REPLACEMENT HIRING	SUCCESSION PLANNING
A narrow approach and usually focused on trying to quickly avoid a crisis by filling a position in a short time.	Takes the additional time needed to ensure that the decision aligns with the organization's strategic plan and goals.
More restrictive, sometimes forcing an organization to select the best person available at that moment.	More flexible and allows you to focus on selecting the best candidate for the position.
Often a quick fix.	Exhibits a long-term commitment to the organization and to developing individuals in the organization.
Usually based on the current job description and with limited time for additional input.	Allows you the time to further develop the job description to include new directions, expanded responsibilities, or adjustments to the position.
Often uses only input from the incumbent and his or her immediate supervisor.	Uses feedback from multiple perspectives and resources.
May offer advancement as a reward or because of seniority with the organization.	Doesn't just consider whether a person has been in his or her position for a period of time long enough to merit an advancement, but rather looks at the person's abilities to ensure that he or she has the competencies needed to be successful in the new role.

the reasons that support pursuing a succession planning approach. And that's just a sampling of the reasons why succession planning is a good idea. 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 expanded management roles.

The How of Succession Planning

In this article, I am not just sharing the ingredients or the cookbook, I'm offering you the recipe! I am providing my proven prescription on how to

implement organization-wide succession planning that will result in a more qualified bench of potential successors. Now you might say, well, I don't want my employees to get their hopes up for a potential promotion. The fact is that ambitious employees already want their reach to exceed their grasp, so their expectations are high. What they want is for you to invest in their capabilities (and not just their technical skills) so when a promotional opportunity opens, they feel competitive. Does that mean that some of those ambitious employees might have to depart your organization because there are not a lot of opportunities

for upward mobility? Yes, it does. Understandably, it's inconvenient when those employees you invest in sometimes leave, but what if you don't and they stay? Key principles to incorporate in your approach to succession planning include:

- Transition from succession planning as something the organization *does to employees* and toward something *you do with them*, so a much wider range of possibilities open up.
- Incorporate succession planning as a significant component of the retention strategy to ensure the organization is being

- proactive about retaining its top performers.
- Realize that employee performance is what you achieve from what you do; potential is what you might achieve with further experience and opportunity to develop.
  - Succession planning reaches further down into the organization, from the supervisory level down to those who are potential supervisors.
  - High performers at one level will not necessarily become high performers at the next level, nor does it mean he or she automatically has high potential.
  - Instead of talent identified for legacy roles and past realities, the organization should create a diversified portfolio of future talent, identified for future needs and equipped with highly adaptive skills.

- Concerns about being perceived as a pre-selection approach are alleviated by the succession planning design using basic elements and proven practices:
- Focus on preparing broad pools of candidates (not hand-picked staff) for higher-level leadership responsibilities, not specific positions.
  - Aim to help all interested employees improve their leadership skills and other skills to give them a competitive edge for positions that open.
  - Do not guarantee promotions, pay raises, or other specific benefits for participating in succession planning programs.
  - Provide wide and open access to all employees who seek career development opportunities.

A successful succession planning process will help prepare and transition front-line workers to take on the role of supervisor—and supervisors to managers. However, what often happens is that employees who are not prepared to be supervisors are moved into a role before they are ready. While they may have knowledge regarding their job and be a qualified practitioner, they may not be equipped with the skills or training necessary to be a good supervisor. Remember: an employee's technical proficiency doesn't always translate well to supervisory effectiveness. Developing a succession planning process and the appropriate support and training programs can help your agency prepare and equip employees to be both good practitioners and supervisors.

As seen in Figure 2, here are the eight steps of an effective succession planning methodology.

### 1. Identify future service needs.

A strategic plan identifies current and future priorities that are the essence of building

a succession planning process. Frequently, organizations concentrate their short- and long-term planning processes on capital improvements, and occasionally on operations, without fully integrating the impacts on the development needs of the employees responsible for delivering the services. A strategic plan, when adopted, is powerful, as it outlines how the organization will reach the measurable goals and objectives that support its mission and vision, both of which should be driving forces in the succession planning process.

### 2. Determine critical positions/jobs/roles.

Effective organizations do not passively wait for the future; they create it by investing their time, thoughts, and planning to ensure the continuity of their talent, their leaders, and their front-line employees. An excellent step toward the adoption of a succession planning process—and a method that will truly reveal your own organization's situation with respect to the

aging of the workforce—is to collect data.

Critical positions are those that are essential for the organization, department, division, work unit, or team to achieve the necessary work results. A high-potential employee is someone who has the capability to advance to one of the following: a critical position, a higher level of responsibility, or a higher level of technical proficiency. This identification step should be completed at the department level by senior management and by the executive management team for the entire organization.

Use Figure 3 as a worksheet in which to enter the number of employees in each of the categories listed. You may want to consider adding another column for the age group of 45–49, especially for police and fire personnel, since many of these employees may be eligible for retirement at 50 years of age.

Gathering and analyzing these types of data (a process often referred to as workforce analytics) will permit your jurisdiction to grasp the current situation and begin to recognize

its significance. You may want to take the analysis one step further to a more “micro” level, by job classification, for example. These types of solid data can be used to convince others, like senior executives and policymakers, not only of the gravity of the situation but also, more important, of the fact that resources must be provided to address it.

The interpretation of the workforce analytics needs to be viewed and considered in light of factors such as strategic priorities, challenges, and trends. In general, the following interpretations can be made about at-risk/critical positions:

**Single Incumbent:** Only one person can perform unique positions and duties in the office or the field. What are the unique duties and why did you identify them as such? Can anyone else complete these functions if the incumbent is absent?

**Critical Task:** Any position that would stop critical action taking place if it were left vacant. If this function did not happen, the organization would suffer.

**Specialized Knowledge and Expertise:** Incumbent has specialized knowledge and/or experience that is only acquired over time or through specialized education and training. Does the agency have the capacity to provide the required training or development to grow the specialized knowledge? Is there limited bench strength of individuals that can perform the function(s) that utilize this expertise?

**Difficult to Replace from Inside or Outside of the Agency:** Position or classification for which the agency has difficulty finding qualified candidates, despite

Figure 2. Approach to Succession Planning and Management

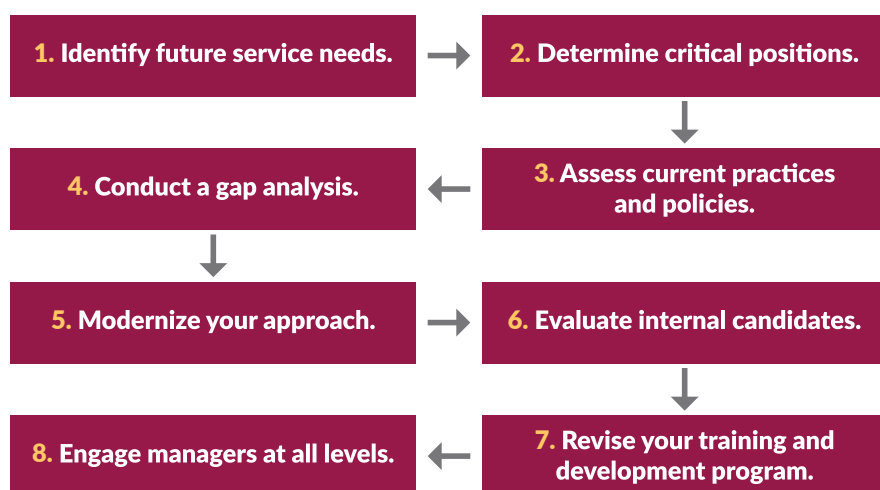




Figure 3.

Attrition Data and Retirement Projections: A Worksheet					
Department	Total Number of Employees	Age 50–54	Age 55–59	Age 60	Total for Ages 50–60+
Administration					
Clerk					
Community Services					
Finance					
Fire					
Human Resources					
Human Services					
Police					
Public Utilities					
Public Works Department					
Other					
Totals					

recruitment efforts. Is a skill set needed that can only be gained by working within the agency? Has it historically been difficult to attract a qualified applicant pool?

**Difficult to Retain:** Position or classification for which it's difficult to retain employees due to factors such as environment, position stressors, wage issues, shift issues, etc. Is there a high amount of turnover in the position? Is the position entry level and used to get a "foot in the door"? Is this position used as a "feeder pool" for other positions?

**Risk of Attrition:** Individuals that are at risk of leaving the agency due to a lack of developmental and/or promotional opportunities. Are there high performers with critical functions that are at risk of leaving due to role

dissatisfaction or because they have high-demand skill sets? Are there retirement-vulnerable individuals who have expressed intent to retire?

**Retirement Vulnerable:** Employees who are or will become eligible to retire within five years. Has the employee started the retirement process or provided notice of retirement?

Typically, effective succession planning programs are not designed for every position in an organization's workforce to be involved unless—and this is highly unlikely—every position is considered critical. Because this is a needs-based approach there may be some detractors who assert the principle, "if you can't do for it everybody, you shouldn't do it for anybody."

This egalitarian notion is acceptable if conditions are stable, but they are not, and it is recommended that you confront and respond to present conditions with respect to where your organization is most vulnerable.

Unfortunately, planning for succession is often overlooked or occurs when it is too late, after key people have left the organization and no internal candidates remain to fill the leadership positions. If your organization executes succession planning correctly, it will have a fully prepared front-line and management staff to step into positions left vacant because of retirement and general attrition.

### 3. Assess current practices and policies.

Before moving forward, you

need a performance baseline of current practices and policies. For instance, you may want to evaluate the effectiveness of the following:

- Existing learning and development programs and services (formal training offerings to equip employees with non-technical/people skills).
- Performance management/appraisal practices.
- Career planning/career ladders.
- Mentoring efforts.
- Knowledge transfer practices.
- Promotional processes.

There is tremendous value from also evaluating current approaches to recruitment and selection activities with the primary focus on how well you are bringing candidates into your organization.



Concerning human resource policies, if your agency is competing for employees seeking a lateral transfer of sorts (i.e., leaving their agency for yours), vacation accrual policies that allow them to continue at their current accrual rate with your agency are much more lucrative than asking employees to start entirely over. Modern policies that reflect the current reality are much more appealing to prospective job seekers than those from the past which, if still in place, will deter top candidates from even considering your agency. Other policies equally as important include issues related to work-life balance, outdated job classifications, rigid compensation rules, portability of pension

balances, relaxing of residency requirements, and revising outdated provisions of the civil service system (if applicable).

#### **4. Conduct a gap analysis.**

So, now you have a good understanding of the strategic direction your agency is pursuing and how that might alter the service portfolio and accordingly the capabilities of your staff. You've also identified the at-risk/critical positions on which the succession planning should focus.

Current policies and practices by your organization related to developing talent likely provide an opportunity for significant improvement. Similar to many organizations, you may not have adapted your succession planning

practices to match the pace at which you must execute your organizational strategy.

Essentially, a gap analysis has been established. The gap is the difference between the succession planning efforts you currently have and the succession planning efforts you need. Consequently, effective succession planning requires a comprehensive strategy of multiple tactics. The next step is to implement specific gap-closing strategies and tactics with laser-like precision.

#### **5. Make adjustments to the dimensions related to building a qualified bench of potential successors.**

There exists the belief in some organizations that succession planning is less formal than recommended here and thus unplanned. However, when

that describes an organization's preferred approach, there is a tendency for job incumbents to identify and groom successors who are remarkably like themselves in appearance, background, and values—a type of “bureaucratic kinship.”

At the same time, there is another belief that succession planning implies that internal employees are entitled to promotions simply because of job tenure. In fact, succession planning is the direct opposite, and when it is systematic, transparent, and comprehensive as is recommended here, it rewards the meritorious and fosters a high-performance work culture.

Based on the gap analysis that was completed, move forward with:

- Various HR policies related to retaining and developing talent.
- Designing program components, including a candidate selection process for leadership, management, and supervisory training and development programs.
- Improvements to recruitment, selection, and promotional practices and processes.
- Facilitating the process to adopt competencies for front-line employees, mid-managers, and executives.
- Modernizing the performance appraisal process, including the requirement that annual individual development and training plans be funded and completed.
- Designing and implementing knowledge transfer programs.

The desired outcome is to modernize your approach and synchronize the succession planning strategy.



## 6. Select internal succession candidates based on objective, job-related assessments, and ratings of promotability or readiness for future positions.

Organizations historically have relied on anecdotal assessments of candidates, and as a result, management often fails to identify all the best candidates, and those considered for advancement or developmental placements are simply those who have become visible to management or possess seniority. Keep in mind that seniority does not always translate to competence, and technical proficiency doesn't always convert to supervisory effectiveness. In addition, when relying on subjective assessments, management personnel tend to focus on potential successors similar to themselves rather than identifying candidates with skills and experiences needed to succeed in the future. Objective and job-relevant assessment data can help effectively identify succession candidates, while also providing essential information regarding the developmental needs of the candidates. A number of off-the-shelf assessments are available—just make sure you don't use personality inventories. Whichever you use, communicate to employees participating that the assessments will not involve possible increases in compensation for the employee as this is strictly about evaluating one's potential. Remember that a high performer doesn't necessarily mean that he or she has high potential.

Factors when considering which employees should be

eligible to participate in a succession planning talent pool are if they demonstrate:

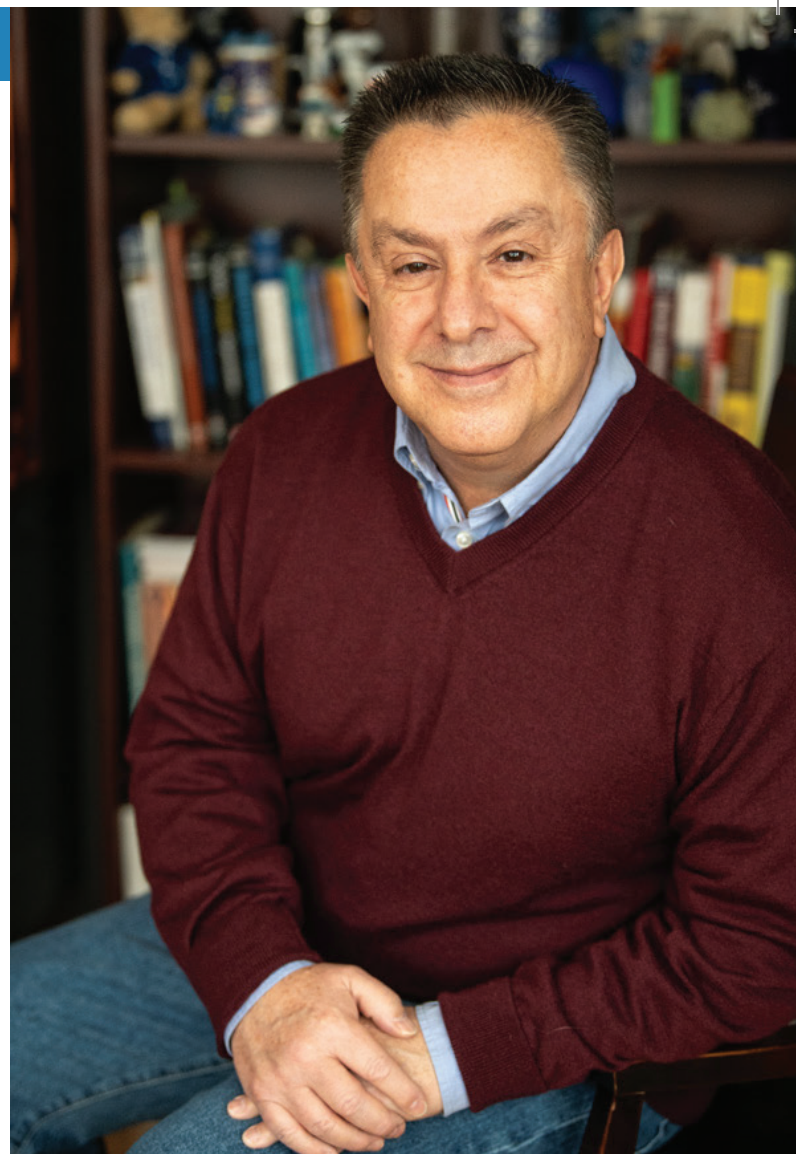
- A significant continued investment in their own development.
- A track record of assisting in the development of others (example.g., through coaching or mentoring).
- Ambition to achieve greater responsibilities.
- A high motivation to learn.

Without these basic competencies, an employee is unlikely to develop the competencies needed for supervisory/management roles. Instead of viewing role- or managerial-level competencies as fixed and generic, you might do better to seek to fill roles with people who have the ability to work out of the competencies that are currently and specifically needed and to adapt themselves accordingly.

## 7. Revise your training and development program.

Given that succession planning has at its core the process of identifying individuals' abilities and providing educational programming designed to enhance their knowledge and develop their leadership expertise, it stands to reason that the learning function would play a significant role. With so much at stake for the entire organization with respect to equipping employees with the needed skills and capabilities to tackle today's and tomorrow's challenges, a more comprehensive, planned approach is necessary.

Developing your employees' skills at a rate equivalent to the rate of change is the key to sustaining high performance. You need people who have the latest and most modern skills along with the ability to



build new ones quickly. That's learning agility. Critical going forward is for you to adopt and implement a contemporary approach to developing your workforce.

Beyond technical and compliance training, the essence of this training is that it's about non-technical capabilities. Let's agree right now to stop referring to these as soft skills. Soft skills go by many names—people skills, human capabilities, “real” skills. In short, they are the intrapersonal (within yourself) and interpersonal (between yourself and others) abilities at the core of how you do what you do to work effectively and productively, interact with others, and build relationships. They are distinct from what are known

as hard skills, or the technical knowledge a person needs to perform a role.

Most public-sector organizations invest a majority of their training budget in employees' technical performance. However, the ability to be an outstanding technical performer does not always translate into the ability to be an effective manager. The performance of managers today in organizations is rated as much on people skills as on measurable output. In addition, the ability to solve problems, resolve conflict, participate on teams, and make decisions are performance needs that frontline staff requires. Although people differ in their baseline abilities, the research shows that skills training can result in better results for most



people who want to improve their effectiveness.

The key for public-sector jurisdictions is to transition away from the practice of offering training to those employees who may or may not want to participate, which is akin to a random approach of ensuring capacity within your agency, and instead take a more targeted approach. Focus on merging employee desire with organizational need, which when blended constitutes a formidable combination. The capabilities being provided through the training are those the agency is seeking as necessary for members of their workforce.

To deepen the capabilities of your workforce members, you should offer a bottom-to-top leadership and management development program with the following recommended objectives:

- **Develop leaders** to cultivate strong leadership to meet the evolving opportunities of a growing organization.
- **Build the critical skills and capabilities** of supervisors, managers and executives required in a rapidly

changing environment, both internal and external.

- **Ease and expedite the transition** that employees' experience as they move from a front-line role to a supervisory role.
- **Improve performance** for increased organizational productivity and effectiveness.
- **Enhance the organization's capacity** to handle strategic, complex, and critical issues in the future.
- **Expand knowledge**, maximizing employee abilities to grow talent from within.
- **Ready the organization for succession planning** through strengthened organizational leadership (i.e., assemble a stronger and more qualified internal bench of potential "successors").

Formats for the delivery of the training material can include both in-person and online. Seek out in-person training to allow for more opportunity for your employees to interact face to face with the trainer and their coworkers, specifically for skills that are

contextual and people centric. Beyond training/learning, your strategic planning strategy should emphasize development. Effective succession planning initiatives emphasize employee development techniques as a means to grow capabilities among your workforce members. Figure 4 shows the most common (and when utilized, most impactful) techniques for strategies for employee development.

Providing a menu of employee development strategies can increase awareness among managers and supervisors that growing the capabilities of their staff is a combination of learning/training and non-training techniques. Offering a specific plan for employees ensures that his or her capabilities are being developed in the direction that benefits them and your organization.

## 8. Engage managers at all levels of the organization.

HR definitely has a visible and influential role in helping steer succession planning efforts, which also happens to coincide with the trend toward a business partner approach

by many HR departments in how they partner with their customers. At the same time, to be successful, "horsepower" from all departments is needed for an effective succession planning program.

To reap the rewards of a stronger focus on succession planning and thus, organizational performance, it needs to be owned by senior management, driven by every single manager, and treated as a high priority. In other words, when senior leaders are actively involved in all things succession planning—revising relevant policies and practices and focus on non-technical learning and development—the quality is much higher. Senior management has a critical perspective in identifying the leaders that the organization needs in the future, but they also have the influence needed to put development at the top of the priority list.

I guarantee that by following these eight steps you will have a stronger bench of potential successors than you know what to do with and won't that be a good problem to have. You will also feel more confident about being proactive and responsive to developing your workforce and ensuring continuity of operations. **PM**

**Figure 4. Employee Development Strategies**



## ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/Documents/2022-2023%20State%20of%20the%20Workplace%20Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/01/17/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues/>

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