LASTING LEADERSHIP

Succession planning template

Succession planning

Succession is inevitable – it's not a case of *if* it happens, but *when* and *how*. Making a success of succession means having processes to manage that change, rather than trying to anticipate every detail.

This template suggests ideas for how to structure a succession planning strategy. It can be used in different ways:

- To think through an organisation-wide approach to capacity building
- For key individual roles or teams
- For planned succession
- For unplanned or emergency succession.

SUCCESSION PLANNING

Principles

The organisation and its work are bigger than any one person.

Lasting leadership is about empowerment, not power. Succession planning is part of an organisational approach to capacity building, shared ownership and delegation. It is not about identifying and grooming successors. Exploring and discussing what to sustain can help in developing sustainable leadership and preparing for the future.

Sustainable leadership:

1. **Requires time.** Leaders and teams need time and space for development, planning, sharing knowledge and learning.
2. **Connects with vision and purpose.** Sustainable leaders focus on work that sustains their purpose and vision.
3. **Prioritises self-care.** Leaders needs to give themselves, and their teams, permission to take time for self-care. Self-care is as an essential part of the job – not a perk or a luxury.
4. **Devolves authority and shares power.** Managers must be willing to relinquish some control. And teams need to have regular opportunities to build their leadership knowledge, skills and experience.
5. **Builds capacity.** Sustainable leaders trust themselves to let go. They trust their teams to step up and their teams trust that their efforts and decisions will be supported.
6. **Requires equality and diversity.** Leadership roles must be open to all. Policies and structures should encourage inclusion and be reflective of our society.

Developing a succession planning strategy

1. Set out the purpose of the strategy

What is the purpose of your strategy? Is it about developing a succession plan itself? Or is it a process, an approach to developing capacity in your service or organisation? Could it be helpful for strategic planning and risk management; contingency planning; business continuity planning; and knowledge management approaches?

2. Define the scope

Which roles will be included in the scope of succession planning? Is it just senior positions like trustees, directors and senior managers? Are there other business-critical roles that the organisation relies on for its survival? Or are all roles to be included? (This is particularly important if you view succession planning as an approach or journey rather than a document or destination).

As well as identifying *who* will be included, think about *what* to include. For example:

Processes: e.g. planning for continuity if services are disrupted; know-how for key tasks.

Knowledge: e.g. developing, storing and sharing the information and ideas needed to fulfil the organisation's strategy.

Relationships: e.g. identifying and managing contact with stakeholders.

Risks: e.g. risks that will be managed or mitigated by the strategy; reference to the organisational risk register.

Responsibilities and obligations: the commitments that need to be fulfilled by different parts of the organisation. For example:

- Core service delivery
- HR obligations and milestones like contracts, appraisals and performance management
- Financial obligations like invoicing, payroll and tax returns
- Requirements for quality assurance and evaluation, including reporting to funders
- Legal compliance e.g. deadlines for reporting to Companies House and the charity regulator
- Programme and project management tasks including milestones, anniversaries and deadlines
- Managing external contractors
- Maintaining external registrations e.g. trade memberships and awarding bodies.

3. Develop plans and checklists

Although succession planning isn't just about developing a plan, checklists for planned and unplanned succession can play an important role. They might relate to individual roles, different teams or the whole organisation.

Things to consider:

Operational plans: Ensure that there is a named lead and back-up person or deputy for all key elements in your strategies and operational plans. Deputies should be supported to keep up to date with those areas of work, for example via regular team meetings, briefings, shadowing or co-delivery.

Operational manuals: It's impossible to codify or write down everything that gets done, or how it is done, but key activities and processes should be documented. This will let deputies or emergency stand-ins make sense of what needs to be done and give them the tools to do so. Simple things like where information is stored (including passwords) are important but easily overlooked.

Knowledge: This might be strategic (e.g. developments in the policy and funding environment; progress towards the strategic plan) or operational (e.g. how certain jobs are done). You might find it useful to carry out a knowledge audit or develop a knowledge management plan – ask us for a free template.

Key relationships and contacts: Internal and external relationships both need to be considered. Internally, is information easily available about how all staff, trustees and volunteers can be contacted? Do people know who to contact about particular issues, opportunities or risks? Externally, are there key relationships with clients, referrers, funders, partners and other stakeholders that need to be maintained? Give careful thought to emergency planning - who needs to be informed if a post-holder leaves or is on long term absence?

Spans of control: What responsibilities and authority do different individuals and teams have? Who would take these on in an emergency? Would it be one person or would different people take on different parts of the role? Is there a nominated deputy, and if not, how will they be identified when needed? Consider the level or extent of authority that can be delegated and note any limits, e.g. budgets, expenditure, decision-making, recruitment and other commitments.

Attitude and aptitude: What key skills, capabilities and outlook should be looked for in a successor? Don't assume you need like-for-like replacements. Consider what a successor might want to do that was not done by the incumbent. Similarly, what should a successor *not* be expected to do that the incumbent currently does? Post-succession handovers should focus on factual information and acknowledge that new people will bring their own ideas and perspectives.

4. Build capacity

Remember succession and knowledge are *processes* not products. They require investment in opportunities to develop practice, things like teamworking, shadowing and observation.

Think about how you can provide a range of opportunities – and how to make them fairly and equally available to all:

Regular exposure: to development opportunities that stretch people and help them to develop skills and confidence in new settings.

Learning and development: promotion and 'vertical' progression opportunities are limited. Learning can enrich people's skills, confidence and motivation, particularly if they are supported to develop within and beyond their current role. Remember it's better to invest in training and risk people leaving than not invest in it and risk them staying.

Involvement and information: people are better prepared to step up or step into new roles when they feel a sense of belonging and ownership. Make sure people are informed about and feel involved in organisational developments.

Innovation and ideas: make use of the range of full skills, experience and perspectives that staff and volunteers bring. Knowledge audits can help match the skills the organisation needs with those that people have to offer – given the chance.

Acting in absence: policies that encourage full delegated authority while managers are on holiday or sick leave are powerful ways to build capacity and plan for contingencies.

5. Communicate

Having regular, open and honest discussions about succession (and its inevitability) can help people become more comfortable with succession and be more resilient when change happens.

Embed discussions about succession into existing processes like risk-assessments, staff appraisals, team and board meetings.

Involve appropriate members of the team in developing a succession plan and developing capacity-building programmes. Share this template and the Lasting Leadership guide to help get people started: available from

www.TheLastingDifference.com