

Succession Planning

Description:

This tool provides resources, checklists and steps in developing a succession plan.

How it can be used:

Succession planning is the process of developing and earmarking individuals for mentorship and personal development, and to prepare them to take on key roles identified in your organization. This is critical to ensure the ongoing sustainability of health organizations.

Use these resources to determine whether your succession plans are adequate; if not, follow the steps to develop clear and effective succession plans for your organization. Ensure that all health leadership have copies of your completed succession plan.

Before you begin...

Know this information before developing a succession plan

1. Your health organization's 'must do' services list (these are the services that your organization must provide).
2. Any legal mandates your organization may have. Note that some leadership positions may require special credentials. You will need to be aware of these before creating your 'lines of succession'.
3. Any related memoranda of understanding (MOUs). For example, any agreement you may have with a Tribal Council or Regional Health Unit to serve as your community's health officer in an emergency event. Make sure you understand how these agreements impact your line of succession planning.
4. Who will choose the key positions that are affected by the succession plan?
5. Who will choose the key skills and abilities for each affected position?
6. Are there organizational cultural or workplace limitations that would affect a succession plan?

Get started...

Elements of a succession plan

1. Completed 'line of succession' paths for each position considered critical in the organization.
2. Documentation of the competencies, abilities and credentials each role requires.
3. A record of staff and any others (external to the organization) that are needed to fill the 'line of succession'.
4. An understanding of current incumbents and future earmarked candidates' strengths, weaknesses and succession readiness.
5. Plans for improving capabilities of all potential incumbents through training in the duties of their alternate roles.
6. Policies for funding educational assistance and leaves of absences.
7. Dedicated funding for senior managers for masters degrees, certificates in health administration, management training programs etc.

Steps in creating a succession plan

1. Make a list of the roles that need succession planning and the skills each role requires.
 - a. Which positions are 'sole incumbent'? (i.e., only one knows how to do that job)
 - b. How many people are involved in doing a task?

- c. Do we have staff able to do those tasks?
2. Figure out how deep you need to go in a 'line of succession' for each role, this will most likely depend of the size of your health organization. For a small local health centre, one or two successors will work. For a larger health organization, three to five successors is better.
 - a. Do we have the staff to meet present and future needs?
 - b. Can staff be developed internally for current/future needs?
 - c. Do we have to go outside the organization?
3. Identify those individuals that will act as successors for each role. Sometimes, for example, in the case of a physician role, the right successor may be external to your health centre.
4. Once your lines of succession are mapped out, look at them side-by-side. If one person is appearing in several different 'lines of succession' it could pose a problem if that person is called upon to perform multiple roles during an emergency. If you do have the same person in the 'line of succession' for multiple roles, you may want to include more people in those 'lines of succession'.
5. Notify all the individuals in your line of succession and create a plan to cross-train them.
 - a. Ensure that employee development and succession planning is included as part of the annual performance management process.
 - b. Ensure that pay for performance is in place with significant achievements in education milestones as part of the decision criteria.
6. Create delegations of authority for those in your line of succession.
7. Make note of the operational procedures that you will need to follow to activate your 'line of succession' as well as any procedures that need to take place during its activation.
 - a. The list should include, who gets notified and how successors get keys/passwords/signature authority, etc., to fulfill their roles.
 - b. Keep in mind that some individuals in the 'line of succession' may have regular roles that need to be performed. Make sure there is someone who can perform these roles in case those 'line of succession' staff members are called into action.
8. Document the 'line of succession' in your Operations Continuity Plan and notify the health leaders within your health system.
9. Train all 'line of succession' staff members how to step into their alternate roles during emergencies.
 - a. If cross-training is not feasible for your organization, ask incumbents to document the job procedures needed to fulfill their critical roles and have them store those documents where they can be accessed by other staff members for reference
 - b. If someone in a critical role takes an absence, use this time to test your 'line of succession'.

Things to remember...

Key success factors

1. Support of leadership and senior management is visible.
2. Ownership of the succession plan by staff management (for affected positions).
3. Tailor it to your organization, (i.e., size, structure, culture, growth rate, etc.).
4. Link the succession plan clearly to the operational plan, with built-in flexibility.
5. Maintain a valid and centralized review process of the human resource talent involved (i.e., a committee structure or assigned role).
6. Base it on valid/reliable competencies and an objective assessment of individuals (e.g., job descriptions, performance appraisals, 360 reviews).
7. Incorporate employee input as appropriate, utilizing existing opportunities for evaluation and dialogue (e.g., performance appraisals).
8. Build the succession plan as one part of a broader management development plan (i.e., you may have a map but have you built skills to prepare employees to get there?)
9. Include developmental job rotations through special assignments, job rotation, committee/taskforce membership or leadership.

10. Integrate this in tandem with other organizational planning models or processes in place in your organization (e.g., business planning, overall workforce planning, performance management appraisals, recruitment/retention initiatives and career planning).
11. Assign accountability and follow through (most critical factor to success).

A. Pitfalls to Avoid

1. Do not fall short. When creating your 'line of succession', ensure your succession planning goes deep enough to avoid gaps in roles.
2. Do not fail to cross-train. Make sure that everyone on your 'line of succession' list knows the roles they may need to perform in an emergency and knows how to perform those roles.
3. Do not fail to document procedures. Always document activation and deactivation procedures. Everyone in the 'line of succession' needs to know how it will be activated and how it will be deactivated – if an employee does not understand these processes, there could be confusion regarding when someone is responsible for their regular duties or when they are supposed to take over other duties.
4. Do not over-activate. There is no need to activate your 'line of succession' every time a leader has a brief, planned absence. Activate only during unexpected absences or periods of long leave.

B. Considerations for Rural Health Organizations

1. Having a small staff may mean you can only train one backup for each critical role.
2. Encourage cross-training, when possible, by having staff compile procedures needed to fulfill their roles and have others try those procedures out. For example, have reception staff create a procedures list for handling the phones and have other staff members practice these procedures.
3. Since it may be challenging to allot the time and resources needed for cross-training, have critical staff develop a job checklist to assist anyone who may have to temporarily fill their roles.

C. If the resources are not in place for a full succession plan, develop a 'condensed' succession plan.

1. Using your list of critical services, create a 'line of succession' for each role. Ensure that the people in line for each role have the skill set that role requires.
2. Name the incumbent's 'line of succession' number one. (You can ask the incumbent to assist you in this process).
3. Name someone who used to hold the position (if still applicable) number two.
4. Name a comparable manager number three.
5. Contact the people in your 'line of succession' to inform them they could possibly be called on to act in these alternate assignments.