

Succession Planning Policy Template

A short internal policy you can adopt and actually follow. Adapt the thresholds and cadence to your size; keep the clauses on evidence and named owners, because those two do the work.

1. Purpose and scope

This policy sets out how [Organization] identifies and develops internal successors for critical roles, so leadership continuity is planned rather than improvised.

It applies to every role designated critical under section 2. It does not cover routine recruitment, nor the transfer of ownership or equity, which are governed separately.

2. Which roles are covered

A role is designated critical where a sudden vacancy would materially disrupt operations, revenue, safety, or a key external relationship. Seniority alone does not make a role critical, and specialists holding irreplaceable knowledge often are.

- ☐ The critical-role list is reviewed at least annually and whenever the organization restructures.
- ☐ Each critical role has one named plan owner who is accountable for keeping its plan current.

3. Roles and responsibilities

HR owns the process, the cadence, the assessment standards, and the records. Plan owners own the content of their plans. The executive team approves the critical-role list. The board or its equivalent reviews succession for the most senior roles at a stated interval.

Ownership held centrally and generally is the most common reason plans go stale. Name a person per plan.

4. Assessment standards

- ☐ Role criteria and their relative weights are agreed before any candidate is assessed against them.
- ☐ Every rating is supported by a dated evidence statement describing observed behaviour, not an impression.
- ☐ Potential is assessed as capacity for greater scope, and is evidenced separately from current performance.
- ☐ Readiness is recorded in windows (Ready Now, 1 year, 2-3 years) and is only advanced when specific development has been completed.

5. Review cadence

- ☐ Each critical-role plan is reviewed at least quarterly by its plan owner.
- ☐ A full succession review covering all critical roles is held at least twice a year.

- ☐ A plan is updated immediately, outside the cadence, when a named successor is promoted, resigns, changes role, or completes a development milestone.

The event triggers matter more than the calendar. A plan reviewed only on schedule is still wrong the moment someone resigns between reviews.

6. Confidentiality and disclosure

State plainly what a named successor is told, and when. Options range from full disclosure to complete confidentiality, and either can be defensible; what is not defensible is leaving it unaddressed and inconsistent between plans.

- ☐ Succession data is accessible only to named roles listed in this section.
- ☐ Being named a successor is a development commitment, not a promise of promotion, and is communicated as such where disclosure occurs.

A successor who learns about their own future from an external recruiter is a common and avoidable loss, and it usually removes cover from every other plan they quietly backstopped.

7. Records

- ☐ Criteria and weights per critical role, with the date agreed.
- ☐ Every rating, its evidence statement, the assessor, and the date.
- ☐ Every change to a rating or weight, with the reason for the change.
- ☐ Development actions with owner, deadline, status, and evidence produced.

A decision is defensible when the reasoning behind it outlives the person who made it. That is the test this section exists to meet.

8. Review of this policy

This policy is reviewed annually by [owner], and after any material change to the organization's structure or leadership. Version and date: [v1.0, date].