



Thread Advisory



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THE ANSWER TO THE SUCCESSION PLANNING CHALLENGE - SUCCESSION READINESS.

In recent years many organizations have taken concerted efforts around one of the most important aspects of talent management: developing strong processes, tools and practices to ensure they are able to identify those individuals who could potentially take over critical roles in the not too distant future. In other words, they have put in motion Succession Planning.

However, often enough the same organizations fall short of being able to appoint any of the individuals identified through the succession planning process into the roles that become vacant and available, or they realize that those identified through the succession planning process have not grown and developed as expected. What could be the problem?

The root of the problem is embedded within the false sense of accomplishment that the term succession planning entails. Everyone genuinely believes that by putting in place the process that has helped identify individuals who are strong performers and have high potential to perform roles of higher responsibility and accountability will do the trick. Everyone believes that by ensuring a transparent process and by communicating the results to the identified employees, the rest will take care of itself. But what very few come to realize, is that the succession planning process, tools and practices only help to accomplish the very essence of the word: the planning stage.

Everyone who know one or two things about business strategy, is well aware that without execution, a plan remains a very attractive paper exercise. Why should it be any different with people strategy? Beyond succession planning, what is needed is Succession Readiness. And this is what is achieved through the rollout of strong succession execution.

MAKNA, a non-for-profit organization focused on supporting underprivilege cancer patients, has been working on putting in place strong talent management practices for the past few years, and I have had the privilege of supporting their efforts as an external advisor. And of course, we have worked on succession planning as one of the cornerstones to achieving organizational sustainability. As part of the efforts, we have done the following:

- Deploy learning and development programmes to ensure consistent understanding and application of organizational values and behaviours required to achieve the desired organizational outcomes and impact. Throughout the last few years, a programme has been conducted to ensure every employee learns or refreshes their understanding around the organizational values and some of the expected behaviours and processes that should be consistently demonstrated. The content of the programme was crafted using the information shared by the Founder with the employees at the early stages of the organization. Dato Mohd Farid used every available opportunity to share with employees his vision, his expectations around how work should be done, and how patients, families, donors and the public at large should be engaged and treated. All his wisdom has been documented and is shared with participants. A book has been published containing his journey and his wisdom. Now HODs and Team Leads have been given the responsibility of facilitating the programmes. They take the responsibility of developing the activities which will be used in each programme to drive the message in a practical manner. It is not about the theory. It is about ensuring people realize



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through action why what they learn is important and what is the impact of their behaviours on others. This is done to ensure the next generation of leaders truly understand and drive the same values and message shared by the Founder. This is also done as a way to observe the type of support leaders require in order to strengthen their own values and behaviours.

- Enhance the way employees are given feedback around the behaviours they display at work in alignment with the organization's values and culture. The main objective is to be able to provide detailed information to each employee about the impact their behaviour has on those with whom they interact on a daily basis. It also serves to reinforce the role and importance behaviours have as an integral part of the services provided to patients, and how behaviours are one of the most important differentiating factors that demonstrate to donors and the public at large why they can trust the organization with the donated money to be used for the rightful purpose. But beyond all of the above, the gathered data allows the organization to identify behavioural role models at all levels within the organization, some of them with the potential of becoming future leaders.
- Strengthen leadership capabilities of senior leaders. One of the most challenging aspects of becoming an effective people and business leader, is the ability to seamlessly being able to be strategic and operational as needed. Most leaders are comfortable with one of the two. They are great visionaries who can paint a picture of the future and inspire those working with them to believe the impossible. Some others are great at rolling their sleeves and working tirelessly alongside their people in executing the strategy. Very few are able to articulate a vision and guide the team through the execution. That is why this group of individuals sit at the top of the organizational pyramid and are called CEOs / GMs. At MAKNA the HODs (Heads of Department) and the Team Leaders are being supported to learn how to look up for visioning and down for strategy execution not just for their own department but across the entire organization. This is done through their active participation in regular strategic retreats focused around formulating the organization's short / middle term strategy and evaluating the actual progress of the short term execution plan. They are required to work together to craft and deliver messages to the employees around how things are going, what are the critical aspects that need attention and what is the focus for the upcoming months. They have been provided with individual leadership coaching to support their individual leadership growth and help them uncover and address their self-limiting beliefs and put in place a plan of action around how to enhance their leadership effectiveness.
- Ascertaining the performance levels and future potential of every employee. Using the collected data around individual performance, demonstrated values and behaviours, and their potential to perform roles of higher level responsibility and accountability, the organization's Talent Council has plotted every individual within the performance/potential matrix to have a clearer view of how all employees fair on these 2 critical organizational dimensions. This has been in itself a learning curve for the Talent Council from a variety of perspectives. First, not



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every aspect of someone's performance in terms of outcomes and behaviours can be distilled into a rating. People's potential is a somewhat elusive and subjective assessment, driven by the assumption that past performance is a good indicator of future potential. So, how can employees be fairly plotted with somewhat imperfect data available? Well, this is the biggest learning. Leaders need to make decisions with somewhat imperfect data. These decisions can change over time, based on direct and indirect observations.

So, if all of this has been done, why do I believe that MAKNA is just doing good succession planning but is not yet in the path of succession readiness? Because, what has taken place in the past few years, has facilitated strong succession fundamentals. The next few years, become critical in ensuring there is succession readiness at all levels of the organization. So, how will this be achieved? There is no magic formulae, but there are certain actions that will be of critical importance to ensure succession readiness and by association organizational sustainability.

1. **Going beyond the performance / potential placement.** The Talent Council needs to take an action-oriented approach around the development opportunities that should be put in place to enable those identified as high potential employees to grow and develop. Not only do they need to identify the programmes, but they need to monitor how individuals are coping with the new challenges, give them timely feedback and make necessary adjustments on people's placement in the matrix on a regular basis.
2. **Deployment of intentional role rotations.** Effective organizational leaders need to have a broad understanding of the entire organization. They need to understand the inter-dependencies between functions, the dynamics between people, the pressures the external environment exert into the organization. This can only be achieved if they get exposed to all these realities, so they can form not only an opinion, but are able to anticipate and craft adequate plans of actions to address the potential issues. Taking leaders away from their comfort zone and their role, into roles foreign to them is one of the most powerful development opportunities available to them. There is a controlled level of risk given that they will have the support of their colleagues in the event that they find themselves in "deep waters". So, one or two rotations of this nature for each leader will be critical.
3. **Building broad and deep technical capabilities.** Succession readiness must take place throughout the organization not just at the top. This is why the organization needs to clearly identify the critical technical and leadership skills required at every organizational level, so that individual development plans are crafted and followed through for employees who have been identified as having potential to perform other roles within the organization. Not just leadership roles, but also technical roles. Succession, is not just about leadership. Succession is also about ensuring critical technical roles, like nurses, doctors, radiographers, fund raisers, volunteers in MAKNA's case, are equipped with the right knowledge and skills.
4. **Building transition and succession paths.** As some employees at different levels near their retirement age, it is important to prepare for a smooth transition. Therefore, it is necessary to start mapping a transition path that may see multiple employees change roles in the near future. When



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paths are designed, the Talent Council will be able to see clearly by using the performance / potential matrix who can potentially be deployed. By rotating some of them, they will be able to prepare them for what is to come. By ensuring they close their technical and leadership capability gaps and leverage their technical and leadership strengths, they will be better prepared to take the next challenge and role.

5. **Deploying technology for efficiency, data management and insightful analytics.** Managing employee data and information effectively becomes an important cornerstone to enable efficient decision-making. It is not just about having the right IT infrastructure. It is also using the latest technologies like AI. Empowering the Talent Council so that data can be extracted and analysed. Using predictive analytics to ascertain possible courses of action. Allowing AI to identify suitable candidates to fill up roles. The opportunities are limitless with technology, never forgetting the importance of validation and natural intelligence to ultimately drive final decisions.

The next five years will witness succession readiness in action at MAKNA. I look forward to continue working alongside the organization to witness the first few leadership transitions!

Please reach out to claudia@thread-advisory.com if you or your organization require any support around putting in place strategic succession planning and/or readiness interventions.